My Life As a Fool

The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.

Psalm 14:1

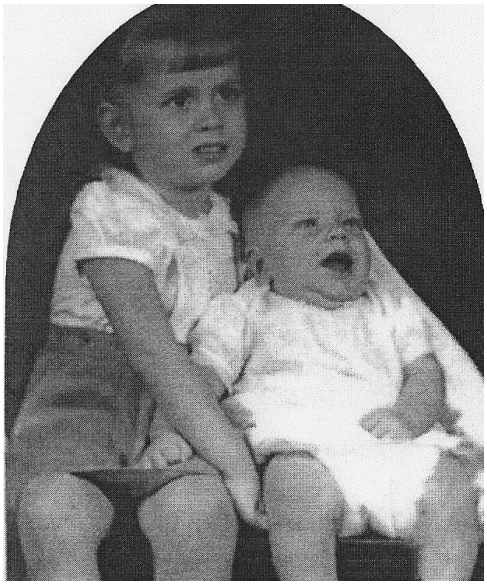
September 23, 2019

Part One

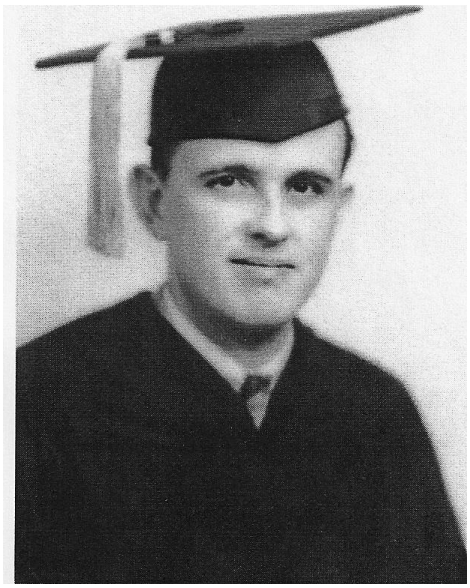
Dear daughter of mine,

As I draw near the close of my life, I want to tell you my story on this your 44th birthday. I hope what follows will give you a glimpse into at least some of the life I have been blessed to have, and perhaps give you some understanding of the circumstances and choices I made along the way that have shaped it. I thought it best to be very open and honest about myself; perhaps brutally so sometimes. I hope you don't mind.

I recently observed my own 78th birthday. Yep, I arrived on the scene on July 7, 1941 at Hermann Hospital in Houston, Texas. My parents, Ethel Lea (Jackson) and Malcolm James Bell, were real glad I was a boy – we didn't have sonograms back then, and everyone just had to wait to see what came out. Anyway, my Daddy was real happy to have his first boy. My sister, Donna Gale, had preceded me by about 2 1/2 years earlier (January 19, 1939). Most people don't believe me, but my first memory was when I was about 12 months old – I remember standing up in my crib and playing with the stuff in my diaper. They were the real kind back then – real cloth, that is.



Naturally, my Daddy named me after himself: Malcolm James Bell, Jr. I think he was sort of hoping I would be a football star. He was a big fan of the UT Longhorns; he had graduated from The University of Texas at Austin a few years earlier.



Malcolm J. Bell
Graduation Picture
University of Texas 1938

My Daddy - your Grandfather - was 31 years old when I was born; he was born back on June 18, 1910, in Dublin, Texas. My Mom must have been about 27; she was born on April 27, 1914, in Azle, Texas. Daddy used to tell me tales about growing up as a little boy in the Depression. He remembered walking along the railroad tracks looking for coal to use to heat the house, and stuff like that.

My Mom was strikingly beautiful; no wonder my Dad fell for her. I see a lot of her in you.

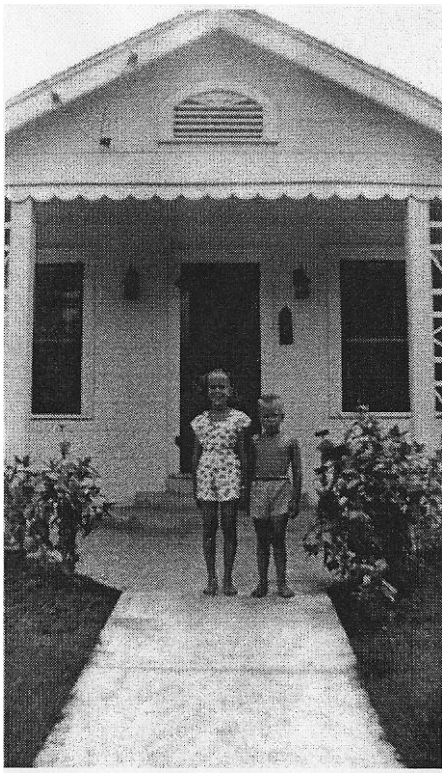
Mom & Dad
1945

Your Grandparents
Malcolm J. & Ethel Lea Bell

1910 - 1978 1914-1981

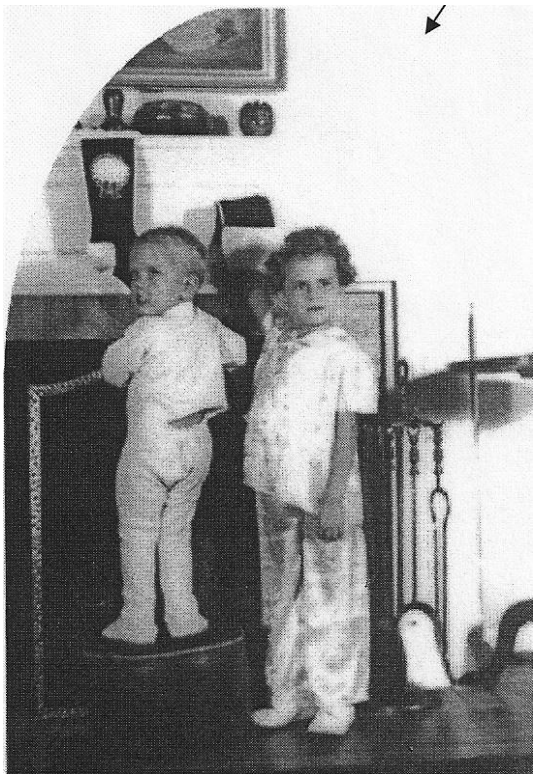
My Mom at 13

I grew up in this small frame house at 1917 Driscoll St. in Houston. That's me and my sister in our summer uniforms.



Our house was over near Shepherd and Welch, not too far from River Oaks, the fanciest area of town at that time (and still is, by some comparisons.) Ours was just a small, lower-middle-class neighborhood. My old house is not there anymore; they tore it down a few years ago and combined two lots to build a townhouse. I think the old neighborhood is going yuppie nowadays. No one had air conditioning back then, but we didn't seem to notice. We got by with an attic fan. My Mom was real chintzy when it came to using electricity, so she had the fan on a timer that would go off about 11:00 at night. Then we would have to sweat the rest of the night.

Here's a picture of me and my sister, Donna, Christmas, 1943. Hard to imagine that I was ever cute and cuddly.



There were lots of kids in the neighborhood, so I always had plenty to do. Mike and David Boettler lived in the house behind me, and my first girl friend (at 4 years old) was Betty Joan Koehler. There was a real cute picture (sorry I lost it) of her and me doing ballroom dancing at some event at the Sam Houston Coliseum (that was downtown, but I think it has been torn down now). I was in a tuxedo that my Mom had made me, and she was in a ballerina outfit. I remember I got lost after our part of the show was over, and I was real scared for awhile until my folks found me.

Back then, kids could play and generally roam the neighborhood by themselves; we didn't have to worry much about boogiemen in the forties. In the summer, we all went barefoot and shirtless, and had a ball playing cops and robbers, cowboys and Indians, hopscotch, baseball, and whatever. No one had heard of TV then, so we all played outside instead. Polio was a big scary thing back then, and my parents made me stay inside the house in the summer from 1:00-5:00 in the afternoon. They had this weird idea that you would be less likely to catch polio if you stayed inside during these hours. Actually, it was the best they could do, since no one really knew how polio was transmitted. I remember I could hardly wait until the clock struck five o'clock, because it was real boring in the house until I could finally go out. My Daddy would usually come home a little thereafter, and I was always very excited to see him. Sometimes he would play catch ball with me.

There was a war going on then (World War II), but it didn't seem to have much effect on me. My Daddy didn't have to go, since he worked in an "essential-to-the-war-effort" industry. He studied Accounting at the University of Texas, and he was the Controller for an oil-related company called A-1 Bit & Tool. Every so often, we kids would go around the neighborhood gathering up scrap metal (mostly coat hangers) to donate to the war effort. We had food rationing at that time, but they always rationed the good things (like sugar, and coffee) instead of the things I hated (like broccoli, and rutabaga, and liver.) My Mom would always make me clean my plate at suppertime, because all the little kids in China were starving, and how could I be so ungrateful? I had to stay at the table until I ate it all – this sometimes went on for almost an hour until I could finally get the courage to hold my nose and swallow down that awful stuff. To this day I can't stand liver.

One Easter Mom and Dad bought my sister and me some real cute ducks – mine was black, and I promptly named him Blackie. Hers was white. Anyway, mine got run over by a bus, and I was real sad. My Mom wasn't one to waste any food, however. The next Sunday we were eating some real strange-tasting meat that I had never tasted before; I didn't like it much. Then she told me it was Blackie, and I had a good cry.

Having a big sister, and not knowing any better, I played with dolls a lot until I was about four. I used to have a real pretty one with big blue eyes that opened and closed when you tilted him. We would give them rides around the house in my little red wagon. In the evenings, the four of us would gather around the radio and listen to the shows. Some of my favorites were The Shadow *("Who knows what evil lurks in the heart of man?; the Shadow knows.")* , The Fat Man, *("He tips the scales at 300 pounds")*, the Lone Ranger with his faithful sidekick, Tonto *("Hi, ho, Silver, away.")*, and of course, Amos & Andy *("Hey, dere, Kingfish")*.

The radio shows always advertised a lot of neat stuff you could send off for with a quarter and a box top from Wheaties, or whatever. One time I sent off for a magic

amulet that glowed in the dark. My sister tried to try to scare me with it, telling me there were ghosts in it.

Fortunately, we had lots of toads in the neighborhood for the catching. They made great pets, except sometimes they peed on you if you held them wrong. Also, I loved terrapins (box turtles). Sometimes my Daddy and I would go driving out in the country early in the morning and catch some crawling across the road. You don't see them much in the wild anymore – between DDT and car traffic, they were pretty much exterminated around these parts. I would often have several, but my Dad always made me let them go eventually, because we couldn't get them to eat anything. You had to be careful of their heads, cause they could really bite hard. There's an old-wives tale that says a terrapin won't let go until it thunders. One time one bit me on the finger and wouldn't let go; so my Mom got a hammer and whacked him on the head until he turned loose. I guess he thought it had thundered. I also guess he had quite a headache after that. My Mom always had the answer for any emergency.

I remember my first big birthday party when I turned four years old. I'd been waiting all week for this party, and when the kids started showing up, I would run outside and grab the present and run back inside. I don't know why, but my Mom said that wasn't very nice. We played a lot of neat games, like pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey, and blind man's bluff, and hide-and-seek, and we had lots of cake and homemade ice cream. I really made a haul with those presents, although I can't remember what any of them were.

One of my favorite things to do was to go with my Mom to the Toy Store on the corner of Welch and Shepherd. I would get lost in fantasy there, and sometimes she would give me a quarter to buy something. We never had a lot of money in those days, but I can't

remember ever going to bed hungry, except when I was being punished for something. I got my rear end whacked pretty regularly. The worst thing was when my Mom would make me go outside and cut my own switch off the hedge. If I got one too small, I would get extra whacks. But those were minor in comparison – when the offense was really bad, I had to "just wait till your Dad gets home". I would sweat it out the rest of the day, and when my Dad got home, I would immediately break out in tears. But it never worked; he would take off his enormous belt, and blister me good. I don't remember what I ever did to deserve it – I don't think I ever murdered anyone, or anything like that.

Christmas was a really special time for me. My sister and I would go downtown to Foley's with my Mom to see Santa Claus. I'd give him my list, and then I couldn't wait till Christmas morning when we woke up to find most of them under the tree. Foley's always had a really neat toy train display in the window and in the toy department. Lionel was my very favorite train, and I got my first set when I was five. It was my hobby for many years. I still have the main pieces; they're in pretty good shape for being 73 years old.

My original Lionel train set which I still have

One Christmas I got a really neat Roy Rogers cowboy outfit, complete with two cap guns that had real bullets that you loaded the caps into. Roy was my hero; I got to see him for real one year at the Houston Fat Stock Show and Rodeo.

Roy Rogers & Dale Evans
(that's not me in the picture)

We saw him at the movies every Saturday. You could get into the Fun-Club at the movies for only 9¢ on Saturday mornings. They always had about ten cartoons, a Roy Rogers or a Lone Ranger serial, and a cool feature like Tarzan and the Apes, and such. Popcorn was extra; it cost 5¢. After it was over, I always called my Mom to come get me. Since the pay phone cost 5¢, we had a special signal worked out. I would let it ring for two times (MAdison 0904), and then hang up. Then she knew it was me, and would come and pick me up. So she saved 5¢ that way. My Mom got a lot of mileage out of a nickel.

They would always have a drawing for a prize at the intermission at the Fun-Club, so you kept your ticket stub. Once, they drew my ticket, and I was really excited when I walked up on the stage. Everyone kept hollering at me to choose the baseball and bat, but I wanted the Brownie camera. It took really cool black & white pictures.

My folks had a 1940 Chevy Sedan that they bought (used) before the war started. During the war, no one could buy new cars because all the auto plants were geared up for the war effort. I remember when the war ended – It was August 14, 1945, and I was four years

old. We put little American flags all over the car, and we all got in and drove around town, honking the horn, and hollering to beat the band.

Our family's 1940 Chevrolet

My sister and I were really into bicycles. Of course, we couldn't ride them on the streets, because that was too dangerous. But there were plenty of sidewalks around to ride on. We would put playing cards on the fender braces with clothespins just so, and then they would make a noise like a motor when you rode the bike. We also did a lot of roller-skating.

Back then the roller skates clamped onto your shoes – you had a little key to tighten them up with, but they were always coming off at inopportune moments, and as a result I got a lot of scraped knees.

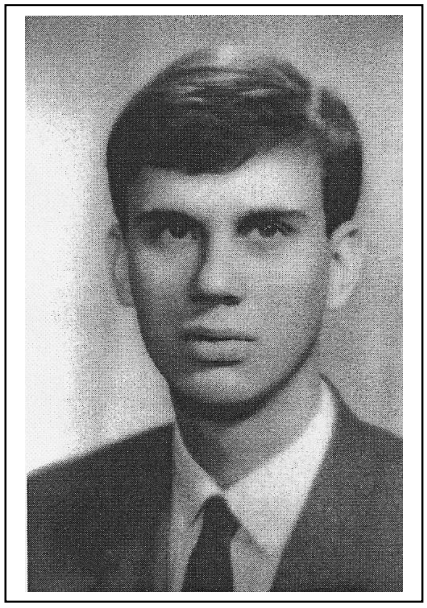
I went to Woodrow Wilson Elementary School down the street for the first three grades. It was about eight or ten blocks away, and we always walked by ourselves. Rick McDowell (more about him later) was in one of my class pictures, but I really don't remember him from then. I remember the school was incredibly hot in the late spring and early fall; we didn't have air conditioning. We had these giant fans on pedestals that made so much noise you could hardly hear the teacher. But we were real glad to have them. The school didn't furnish the fans; they had to be bought with the funds raised by special PTA projects, such as paper drives, and so forth.

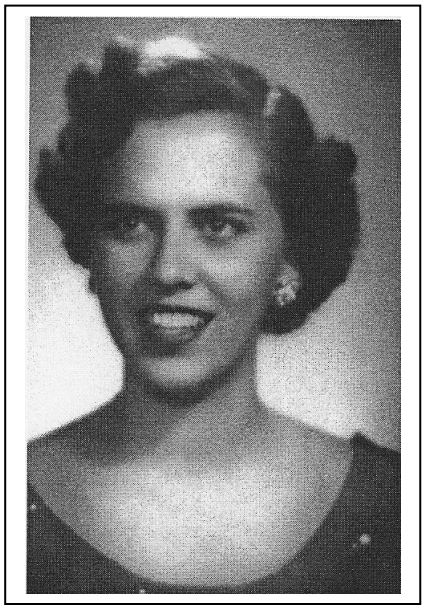
Someone once wrote a book titled "*All I Ever Needed to Know about Life I Learned in Kindergarten*". All I remember was that we made a lot of Japanese lanterns out of crepe paper with scissors and that awful paste that made you sick when you ate too much. At 10:30 in the morning, we all had little cartons of milk to drink, and then we had to lay down on our pallets and take a nap. I was already reading at four years old (I taught myself from the funny papers), so I was the prize reading and spelling student. At the end of the semester, we got our report cards. Some big kid asked me if I passed or failed, so I told him, not knowing the difference, that I failed. I guess I didn't, though, because I started first grade the next year.

When I was about seven years old, I noticed my Mom had a lot of trouble driving our 1945 Chevy because her belly was in the way. My Dad bought her a knob (you may remember the politically incorrect name we had for it) to put on the steering wheel to make it easier for her to drive. I didn't know much about what was going on, but one day some neighbors came and got me out of school, and I went home and found out I had a new baby brother, Robert Reagan Bell, born on April 15, 1949.

Your Uncle
Reagan Bell

1949 - 2014





Your Aunt
Donna Bell Bannert

1939-

He was a lot of fun, but he sure smelled bad some of the time. And he had this weird habit of rocking himself in the crib lying on his knees. He would keep butting his head against the headboard for hours at a time, it seemed. I was afraid he might get brain damage, and that would probably even be worse than polio. I got awfully tired of changing his diapers. Since there wasn't much room left in the house, my Daddy built a room in the attic where Donna and I could play without waking the baby.

Since good folks went to church, we went nearly every Sunday to Bering Memorial Methodist over near Cherryhurst Park. I never knew who Mr. Bering was, or what the memorial was, either. We would go to Sunday school while Mom and Daddy went to the adult church. We sang a lot of songs out of the hymnal, but they always skipped the third verse, and finished on the fourth. I always thought that was sort of silly. What was always wrong with the third verse? Anyway, I wasn't real crazy about going to church. You had to dress up, and even wear a tie, and I'd rather have been playing outside barefoot. But we sometimes got to eat out at Leslie's Chicken Shack afterwards, and that made it a lot better.

For a long time my sister and I went to Bible Study at this lady's house once a week after school. There were a lot of other kids from the neighborhood there, and they would make us memorize a lot of Bible verses, but that was OK, because if you did real well, you got some sort of prize. I was real good at quoting John 3:16 and Romans 10:13.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. John 3:16*
>
> *For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Romans 10:13*

My Mom made us kids a chart that she hung in the bathroom. Every day, we would get a red star for each function we performed, like brushing your teeth, or your daily B.M., or whatever. At the end of the week, we would get a gold star for each function if we had all red stars. I always tried my best to outdo my sister with the most gold stars. My sister used to boss me around some when I was little, but one day when I got bigger, I bopped her one, and she settled down after that. She was a real good sister, as sister's go. But boys were more fun to play with, usually; they could always run a lot faster.

One day I was climbing a tree I wasn't supposed to, and I fell out and broke my left arm. It was real neat being the center of attention that day, and when I got back home from the doctor, I had a pretty white cast on my arm, and everybody signed their names on it, and stuff. They never even got mad at me for climbing on that tree, either.

Doctors' offices. Wow, those were pretty scary places! They always smelled of alcohol, and they always had a Bunsen burner going in every room (to kill all the germs, they told me.) Those shots really hurt, too. I would try not to cry, but I just couldn't help it. When I was about four years old, they had to take my tonsils out. Back then, you always had to have your tonsils out when you were a kid. Now that was scary! They put this funny looking mask over my face, and it smelled real strong. Then they told me to count backwards from ten, and before I got to 6 everything went black. When I woke up, my throat was real sore. I couldn't even eat ice cream. Sometimes our doctor, Dr. Blair, would come to our house if I were really sick. He had this neat black bag full of torture instruments, and he always said this won't hurt much, but it always did. He was pretty nice, though, other than that.

I had the measles, and the mumps, and chickenpox. I remember the measles: my Mom hung blankets over all the windows so I wouldn't go blind. It was real hot in there. Sometimes, when I would get an earache, my Mom would pour hot olive oil down my ear, and then it just hurt worse. I would have to lay there with my ear on a heating pad, and that usually made it feel better. It's best to stay away from earaches, if you can. They're pretty awful.

One of my favorite things was when we would all go up to New Braunfels for a vacation. We would go to a real great family camp right on the Comal River. Did you know the Comal River is the shortest river in the world? It comes up out of the ground from artesian springs, and flows into the Guadalupe river after about 2 1/2 miles. Anyway, this Camp Warnecke had really neat screened-in cabins, and they even had old-fashioned iceboxes that used real blocks of ice. There was always a huge quivering mound of daddy longlegs spiders hanging under the eaves. My sister and I would have a blast riding down the rapids on inner tubes, and diving underwater for fool's gold. Early in the morning I would go by myself down to the river and try to catch perch using worms as bait. The water was so clear you could see the fish swimming around the bait, but it was real hard to get them to bite. I heard my first rock-and-roll song on the jukebox at that place. It was a new song called "Rock Around the Clock" by Bill Haley and the Comets, and I loved to play it over and over.

Camp Warnecke Life magazine story, 1951

One summer we made a change, and went to another family camp in Kerrville. We didn't stay very long, though. The man that owned the place gave us rides all over the place on his motorized golf-cart. He took my big sister for a ride once, just the two of them. When they came back, my big sister was crying. Seems he had tried to bother her, whatever that meant. My Daddy got real hot about it, and he beat that guy up pretty bad. I'd never seen him so mad. (My Daddy took boxing in college.) So, we left right after that, and we went back to Camp Warnecke instead. I liked it a lot better, anyway. So did my sister.

But my absolutely very favorite thing was when we all went up to visit Gran-Gran and Granddaddy up at their farm outside of Fort Worth, Texas. There weren't any freeways back then, so we would all pile in the Chevy after Dad got home from work and get there about ten o'clock at night. My Dad always had a personal contest to see how quickly he could get there, so he usually drove about 90-100 mph whenever he could (on 2-lane highways, no less.) One time we were going up for Thanksgiving and he blew up the engine. He was really hot about it. I used to sleep on the floorboard in the back seat, and it was always hot, because the hump in the middle of the floorboard was so hot. You had to leave all the windows open, so it got kind of breezy at around 100 mph. By that time, my little brother was old enough to be a pest, and he had better not cross the invisible line on the seat with any part of his body, or he would really get it. My Dad always used to yell at me to quit kicking the back of his seat, or he was going to put a knot on my head. Sometimes he did just that, too.

On the way up to Fort Worth, we would always have a lot of fun reading the Burma Shave signs. Every few miles or so, there would be a series of signs stuck on fence posts with some sort of corny rhyme, and the last sign would say "Burma-Shave" (that was a brand of shaving cream then). I still remember one of the rhymes:

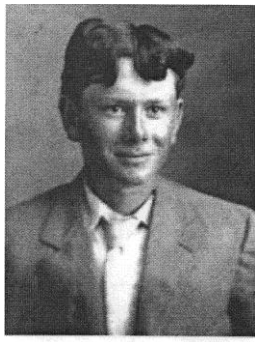
Here lies Les Moore
Shot through with a .44
No Les, no more
Burma-Shave

My Mom's parents, Gran-Gran and Granddaddy, were the delight of my young life. Robert I. (Ingersoll, he later reluctantly admitted to me) Jackson was born on February 2, 1892. I might have been his favorite grandchild – at least I thought so.

Your Great Grandparents
Robert I. & Mittie Jackson

1892 - 1966

1894 - 1957



He was a machinist at the Bomber Plant (it was called Convair back then) where they built the holy-terror B-36 Peacemaker.

B-36 "Peacemaker"

They had 6 huge prop engines of 3,800 horsepower each; and they were mounted on the wings facing backwards. Since the Bomber Plant was pretty close as the crow flies, they were always flying low when they came over the house. They would shake the whole house, and they made an awesome noise. My Granddaddy was a working man, but he hated the unions with a passion. Many were the times he got beat up by the strikers when he wouldn't honor the picket line. The strikers called men like him "scabs". He didn't care; he

was tough, and he said he had a family to feed, by God, and to hell with those lazy, no-good union workers.

Granddaddy bought a little 100-acre farm outside of Fort Worth with some money he got from a court settlement in 1940. Seems he was illegitimate, and his own daddy wouldn't ever own up to him. His daddy, Jno. L. Jackson (I always thought Jno. was a pretty silly abbreviation for John, but that's how his tombstone reads) was a very wealthy landowner around those parts – time was, he owned most of two counties. When he died, he left $1 to my Granddaddy and the rest of all his money to the Spiritualist Church.

Your Great Great Grandfather
Jno. L. Jackson
1854 - 1919

My Granddaddy said his Daddy had been trying to buy his way into heaven (*The Who* used that line in their rock opera, *Tommy - "one pound seven; buy your way to heaven!"*), but he also said he was pretty sure it hadn't worked. Anyway, my Granddaddy fought it in court for about eighteen years. Most of the money went to the lawyers, but he managed to get a small settlement of around $40,000, which he used to buy his farm. Granddaddy was raised by relatives around Silver Creek, Oklahoma. His mother, Georgia A. Young, died at 72 in 1932.

Your Great Great Grandmother
Georgia A. Young
1860 - 1932

He once took me up to see his Daddy's grave. It was all covered with weeds, and Granddaddy wouldn't let me clean it up any like we did with other family graves.

My Grandmother, Mitah (Mittie) Lavina Payton, was born December 14, 1894. She used to tell me tales about coming over to Oklahoma from Kentucky by covered wagon. The Indians were still real pesky even at that time – she remembered being attacked by a group of no-good Comanches, and remembered arrows sticking out of the top of the wagon. She once told me about a gunfight around a campfire one night, and one man was killed. She and my Granddaddy married at a young age – she was 19, and he was 22 - and they had three daughters: my Mom, Ethel Lea (the oldest), my Aunt Louise, and my Aunt Linda (born as a surprise gift when my Mom was already about twenty).

Since we're into old pictures: here's one of your great-great-great grandfather Joseph Hill (on my Mother's side):

But this farm – it was absolutely a kid's delight. It was my very favorite place in the whole world. We would get there late on Friday nights, and I still have yet to see the stars as bright as they were above that farmhouse. We had to drive several miles on a gravel road after leaving the highway, and that was always a trip, since my Daddy still wouldn't slow down any. His favorite sport along this drive was to drive over jackrabbits; sometimes he could get maybe five or six along the way. I'll always remember the "thud" sound they made when we got one. Country folk considered jackrabbits to be pests to be exterminated at all cost, since just a few of them could eat as much as a full grown cow, and since they could absolutely destroy your garden. Please don't consider my Daddy as especially cruel – he wasn't; this was just the way they were brought up. They didn't like prairie dogs, either, since prairie dog holes could break a horse's leg at a full gallop, and horses were real valuable (the horse always had to be shot). My Daddy said it was great sport shooting prairie dogs when he was growing up, but there weren't any left to shoot by the time I got here.

I was always so excited when we got there I couldn't get to sleep. Especially because of my Granddaddy - I have never heard anyone snore as loudly as he could. I swear; the walls would literally vibrate. The next morning, my Daddy and I would get up early and go rabbit hunting with our .22 rifles. Daddy bought me my first rifle when I was seven years old. I had to memorize the "Ten Commandments of Gun Safety" before he would let me shoot it. I never could understand why it was so dangerous to mix gunpowder and alcohol – and what did that ever have to do with shooting a gun?

NEW
5 lb., 37" CARBINES with HINGED FOREND
Scope extra $9.35
$21.95 MODEL #142 .22 cal. bolt action, 7-shot repeater. $22.95 west of Rockies.
$26.95 MODEL #152 .22 cal. 7-shot automatic. $27.80 west of Rockies.
Insist on a Mossberg, at your dealer's.
FREE . . . Send for catalog with full story of Mossberg rifles, shotguns, scopes. (No sales at factory)
O. F. Mossberg & SONS, INC.
6002 St. John St., New Haven 5, Conn.

Anyway, we would usually get a couple of jackrabbits before breakfast.

My Grandmother could cook a mean country breakfast. She never measured anything; she just threw it together, and her biscuits were absolutely the best in the world. Most everything they cooked was raised right there on the farm. They had a really neat old refrigerator in the kitchen – it ran on butane gas. I never could figure out how you could make a refrigerator cold by burning a gas flame. Didn't make much sense to me. But then I never could figure how a brown cow would eat green grass and give white milk which turned into yellow butter, either. Sometimes, if it was real cold outside, the butane tank would freeze up, and Granddaddy would have to build a wood fire under it to unfreeze the butane gas in it (imagine that!). The house was two stories, and was heated by open-flame gas heaters with ceramic reflectors. That's your great-grandmother standing in front.

It had a huge screened-in porch on the side of the house, and directly above it was a widow's-walk balcony that opened off the main bedroom. Once I was up on the balcony during a thunderstorm, and it rained several small minnows on the balcony. (I'm not making

that up, either). We had a lot of really hairy weather around there sometimes. They had a storm cellar for when tornadoes came. It was real scary to go down the stairs to the cellar, because of the black widow spiders there. You know, they stored their potatoes from the garden there? They were good all year until the next crop, too.

They had a windmill that pumped the well, and the water was piped to a huge wooden storage tank on a tall tower next to it. One time I went up there when I wasn't supposed to, and I peeked into the tank. It was sure scary up there, because it was so high up. There were some dead birds floating around in the tank, but they never seemed to make the water taste bad.

Also, you had to be careful when you turned on the water in the bathtub. Once, I was in it when I turned it on, and a scorpion came out of the faucet. Believe me, I got out of there in a hurry. Another time, I was watching my Granddaddy put on his trousers in the morning. He forgot to shake them out, and a scorpion stung him on the leg seven times before he got them off. You never heard such hollering and screaming in all your life.

They had this cool Ford tractor that my Granddaddy would let me drive.

Early 1939 9N with aluminum grille

I would go all over the countryside on it – I especially liked to go down to the Richardson's creek and go fishing or shoot turtles with my BB gun. Sometimes my Daddy would take my sister and me down to the tank, and we would shoot turtles with our .22 rifles. We got to be real good shots. Other times we would go down to the dump and target shoot. We would find a lot of cans, and coke bottles, and line them up and have contests to see who could hit the most. Once, after a hard rain, I was puzzled to see small frogs come up seemingly out of nowhere, since the dump was bone dry most of the time. Maybe it rained them, also. We had real strange weather.

My Granddaddy raised chickens, turkeys, hogs, sheep, and cattle. My day would start by helping Granddaddy milk the cows. First, you had to go round up the cows, and put them in the barnyard. Then you put feed in the trough, and closed the board around the cow's neck so she couldn't get out while you milked her. There were always a lot of cats around, and it was fun to squirt milk in their faces. They loved it. After the milking was done, we would take it to the separator house where we separated the cream from the milk. We sold the cream to a dairy, or made butter out of it in a churn. My Granddaddy would let me turn the handle to the separator. You had to keep cheesecloth spread over the milkbowl while you were separating it, or you would get flies in the milk.

Afterwards, we would go to the chicken house and gather eggs. It was an awfully smelly place, but I liked it. The chickens would get really mad and squawk a lot when you took their eggs out of the nest. You were supposed to leave one egg, to encourage them to keep on laying. Sometimes we would get to watch when a calf was being born; I remember Granddaddy had to help once by sticking his arm inside and pulling. However, they never would let us watch when they put the bull in the barn with the cows. Later, when I got a little older, I would kind of get embarrassed when they let me watch.

There was an old man by the name of Leon who helped out with the chores. He lived out behind the water tank in an old shack. He must have been 200 years old, and my Granddaddy said he was a little simple-minded. He didn't even have any teeth. He was a distant relative, and he had no where else to go. So my Granddaddy gave him a place to live out back, and Leon did chores around the farm for his keep. He chewed a lot of tobacco, and he was always spitting a stream across the bucket when he would milk the cows. He was a real good shot – he could hit a cat square between the eyes with a good spit from almost six feet away. He and I were real good friends. I would visit him in his one-room shack, and he would show me the treasures he had hidden away in his footlockers. He used to save the twine from the feed sacks, and he would make big balls of string from it after he tied the ends together. Nobody wasted anything around there – my Mom used to make shirts for me out of empty feedsacks. They always had real pretty patterns on the cloth, but the shirts were kind of rough.

Granddaddy set Leon up so he could get his social-security checks; I think it was around twelve dollars a month. Leon would save it up, and sometimes he would let me peek at his treasure he kept hidden in old tobacco cans. We used to sit around in the afternoon when it was too hot to go outside, and he would tell me a lot of yarns about his life while we both

swatted flies. Seems you couldn't keep them out, no matter how hard you tried. Leon took a bath about twice a year when Granddaddy pestered him; otherwise, he wouldn't use the bathroom in the house. He preferred the outhouse a few yards away behind the chicken shack.

They used to have the neatest old dog I ever saw; his name was Shep. He was so smart – you could point and tell him to go get the cows, and that dog would run a half-mile away and bring back the cows all by himself. One day, though, Granddaddy caught him in the chicken shack eating eggs - so he had to shoot him. He *"couldn't abide an egg-sucking dog"*, he said. I was real sad when he did it.

When I was seven years old, my Mom and Dad let me spend the summer at the farm by myself. I went all by myself on a train to Fort Worth, and Granddaddy picked me up at the train station. Before my Mom would let me go by myself, she made me learn to be especially careful when you crossed the road – you had to be sure to look both ways real good. Granddaddy picked me up in his Model A Ford – that was a wonderful car. It had a rumble seat in the back, and it had a really neat horizontal speedometer that worked like a compass. I had never seen anything like that.

My Mom made sure I wrote her every day, and I would tell her how many birds I shot with my BB gun, and whatever Granddaddy and I did that day. I was faithful to write every day; I wish I still had those letters.

Sometimes Gran-Gran and I would drive to Weatherford to sell the eggs and cream. We would always visit the Town Square where there were lots of old cowboys sitting around in chairs and spitting tobacco. We would go to the drugstore, where she always got me my

favorite – a cherry phosphate coke - and maybe a nickel candy bar. It was fun to go with Gran-Gran. She always got lost driving there, but we seemed to eventually make it somehow. She and Granddaddy bought me a real straw hat, and I was real proud to wear it everywhere I went.

She had a red 1951 Studebaker convertible, and it was a blast to ride in it with the top down.

Once I found a baby bird that had fallen out of a nest. I kept it, and caught a lot of grasshoppers to feed it, and named him "Lucky". It grew up, and would fly around the house, and would perch on my shoulder. One day I was running through the house and I accidentally stepped on my pet bird. I was really upset, as he was obviously hurt real bad. I took him to my Grandmother to see if she could do anything, so she pulled his head off. She said she couldn't abide seeing little things like that in pain. After that, though, I never brought her any of my pets to doctor.

My Grandmother was a grand-champion at wringing chicken necks. We would catch a few fryers, and she would swing them around by the neck and pop off the heads slick as a whistle. They would always run around for awhile without any heads on them, just the bodies, and that looked pretty weird. Then we would put them in a tub of boiling water to loosen the feathers before plucking them off. It was a really smelly operation.

Also, occasionally we would make lye soap out of bacon grease and lye from the fireplace ashes. It was mostly only good for doing laundry, though, because if you got it on your skin, it would sometimes take the hide right off. I would help her do the wash. She would fill two tubs with boiling water – one for the soapsuds, and one for the rinse. She

scrubbed the clothes on a wash board after they "biled" awhile, and then rinsed them and wrung them out on the wringer. My job was to turn the crank on the wringer, and you had to be careful not to get your fingers caught. Then we hung them all out on the clothesline. They were always stiff as cardboard when they were dry. They smelled pretty stout, too.

Granddaddy used to let me help with plowing on the tractor. Later, I would sit back on the seeder and operate the levers while he drove the tractor. Or at least I thought I was doing something; he probably was just using me for ballast. We planted mostly alfalfa hay, and when it was ripe, we would cut it and bale it. You had to be real careful around the hay-baler. Granddaddy told me once he saw a man's arm torn plumb off when he got his hand caught in it. Granddaddy was always teasing me about something. Once we were driving by a cemetery, and he asked me how many dead people I thought were buried there. I said I didn't know, then he told me, *"all of them"*. Sometimes Granddaddy and I would go in to town in his pickup truck to get a load of feed. Or sometimes we would stop by the stale bread place by the bakery and pick up a load of bread and cinnamon rolls for the hogs. Some of those cinnamon rolls tasted pretty good to me; I don't know why they were throwing them away.

It's amazing how much influence certain family members can have on a young life. For example, my Granddaddy served in the US Navy when he was young. Naturally, he did what all young sailors did – he got a couple of tattoos on his arms. He later grew to regret those tattoos very much. He would always tell me he made a big mistake when he did it, and that he sure hoped I would never do such a foolish thing as that. Sure enough, I never did. Of course, nowadays getting a tattoo is a common as buying a loaf of bread. What do I know?

And Granddaddy was always making some comment about things such as how the unions had turned into such a terrible thing for Americans – I despise unions to this day. One day we were driving past a golf course, and he made the comment that he just didn't understand how a man could waste all that time and energy chasing a little white ball out in the hot Texas sun. So I never cared much for golf, either.

Sometimes my cousin Tim would come to visit. He was a few years younger than I was. Granddaddy would let us sleep in the guesthouse out back, and we would have a blast having "make smelly" contests under the covers and giggling until the wee hours of the night.

Lazy, lazy summer days. There was no end of things for a kid to do on a farm. How I would love to see that old place again; but it's all changed now. But I still have the precious memories. Well, much as I wanted otherwise, I couldn't stay on the farm all the time. So it was always good to get back home, and see what everyone else was doing.

Just before I started in the fourth grade we moved to a new house at 2234 Southgate Boulevard over not too far from Rice Stadium. It's still there, and the last time I looked, it seemed much the same.

We had three bedrooms in this house. I had to share mine with my brother, which was sort of a pain. Of course, we brought our old dog, Amber, with us, and she was quite happy to have some new meter readers to chew on. That was the meanest Cocker Spaniel I ever laid eyes on; she despised the meter readers who had to come in the back yard to read the meters. She wouldn't even bark. She just growled, hunkered down, and started biting. It's a wonder one of them didn't kill her, but she finally died of old age. She gave us three litters of puppies, and I'll always remember the wonderful smell of those little critters when they licked you in the face.

Me, my sister, and Amber

I made a lot of new friends in this new neighborhood. Now I was going to Oral Roberts Elementary around the corner on Greenbrier Avenue. I was always the champion in the spelling bees. One time I was in a line of contestants by the windows. I was so bored with

the whole thing, I thought it would be a good idea if I just spit out the window. The teacher didn't take it too kindly, however, and she sent me to the principal. She told me only monkeys in the zoo would do such a thing, but I didn't get paddled, anyway.

One of my new friends was Byron Hanna. He lived in the house just behind us. We got to be such good friends that we strung a private telephone from my bedroom to his. I made it out of old telephone parts I scrounged from junk piles. Byron and I palled around a lot. Strange the turns life takes – several years ago I learned he had committed suicide by blowing his brains out with a shotgun. He was married, and had two little children. Who can know what drives a man to such acts?

I was in love with the girl next door, Bonnie Hubley. She was the most gorgeous thing I had ever seen. We used to hold hands in the backyard out in my tent that I had made out of a sheet. Sometimes, we would hold hands in the movies, too. She had a really bad habit of also seeing my friend across the street, Jack Wetmore. I was really jealous when she went over there for dinner sometimes.

Once my sister and I put on a play over in the Hubley's garage. She was the writer and director, and I was sort of the stage manager, although I did have one walk-on part. I think the play was based on the current TV hit, Dragnet, starring Jack Webb (*"I'm a cop. Los Angeles is my beat….. Just the facts, Ma'am; we just want the facts…."*).

We invited everybody in the neighborhood, and we sold tickets: grown-ups 15¢, and kids 5¢. We even had a part for our dog, although she didn't cooperate very well. Everybody clapped a lot, so I guess it was a hit.

About this time, I got interested in the Scouts. I went the whole way; I was a Wolf, and then a Bear, and then a Lion in the Cub Scouts. Of course I had lots of merit badges that I earned for doing stuff like building model boats out of two-by-fours and sewing-thread spools (for smokestacks). On days when we had Pack Meetings in the afternoon, I got to wear my uniform to school. I also took tumbling lessons, and even learned to tap dance for awhile. I took piano lessons, too, but I could never read the music. It just didn't make sense. I would learn the melody by ear, and play it from memory. I remember a few piano recitals where I had to wear a tuxedo with tails. I hated to practice the piano with a passion, though, and I soon griped enough to where my parents relented. Now I regret that decision; the ability to play the piano would have been a precious talent.

Christmases came and went, and I was growing up into a teenager (with pimples, no less; I hated those things). I was really active in the Boy Scouts, now. My passion was our weekends spent camping out. I would do anything for an opportunity to camp out. Even now I have patches of memories about those glorious times of freedom and adventure. Once a group of about five of us were hiking by ourselves through the woods in the Cleveland National Forest (east of Houston). We were given a map, and a compass, and were supposed to rendezvous at a certain point on Sunday. Naturally, we promptly got lost, and spent all weekend wandering around in the forest. It was freezing cold that night, and we all crowded around the campfire in our bedrolls. One of the guy's bedroll caught on fire, and we had nothing to put it out with, since our canteens were frozen. So we finally all got up and peed on it, and put it out. Of course, it was kind of smelly to sleep in then after that, but you do what you have to do. We finally wandered onto a road, and were rescued. So much for our trail blazing.

Like I said, there were a lot of kids to play with over on Southgate. Of course, there was Mack and Jack Wetmore across the street. We played together a lot, and we even got into trouble sometimes. My Mom said the Wetmores were pretty rich, and that she wasn't sure about everything they did, but they let me go over there, anyway. I always liked Mrs. Wetmore – she was really pretty and nice. The Wetmores even drank whiskey; that was something we didn't do at my house. Also, they had "air-conditioning" - I had never before seen that in a home.

One thing I did notice that was different about Mrs. Wetmore. She was very loving with her children, and she hugged and kissed them all the time. I had never seen anything like that before, either, and I wondered what it would be like if my Mom were that way. But she never was. I never had a very close relationship with my Mom. None of us kids did. She seemed rather aloof; she did what was expected of her about her kids, but I'm not sure she was really into it. I could never please her with anything, it seemed, so I mostly just tried to stay out of her way. She and my Dad fought some, but it wasn't real regular

to my remembrance. My Dad really loved her a lot, but I'm not sure he ever pleased her, either. Once they talked about a divorce, and I was sure hoping I could go with my Dad if it had to happen. But my Dad wouldn't do that; it wasn't the way he was brought up, and I have great admiration for his commitment to his marriage.

But it is not for me to judge her for any perceived shortcomings. We only get one Mom and one Dad, and the Bible says we should honor our parents if you want to "*live long and prosper*". You didn't know that Star Trek borrowed that phrase from the Bible, did you?

> *Ephesians 6:2-3*
> *2 Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;)*
> *3 That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.*
> ---------- prosper ------- -------- live long ----------

After all, it was God who gave our parents to us – should we question His wisdom? I certainly have been a less-than-perfect parent myself. You have been blessed to have a wonderful Mom who loves you very much – don't ever forget that. I wish my parents had lived to know you; I'm sure they would have loved you a lot.

Wendell Foreman lived just a few houses down the street. We got to be fast friends. Wendell was a dwarf – he was only 3' 10" tall. A lot of the kids at school made fun of him. Sometimes he would get mad, and really lay into them. He was pretty tough for a little guy. We made a lot of model airplanes, and stuff. A few years later, a lot of the kids around the neighborhood started driving go-karts. Wendell and I each had one, too, and we would roam around the neighborhood in packs of four or five of us at a time. Mine would go about 35 mph, but Wendell's was a little faster on the take-off. We had an area of about 1/2 half mile square where there wasn't much traffic, and we could also drive all over the parking lot at Rice University Stadium, which was about 1/2 mile away. My go-kart had a big wooden block that clamped down on one of the wheels as a brake. I didn't use the brake much, though, because it would peel a lot of rubber off the tire, and tires were expensive. So I mostly just used my feet when I had to stop. My Mom couldn't figure out why I was wearing out my shoes so quickly.

Wendell was in the Scouts with me, and we always went camping together. Later on, when we turned 14 and got our driver's licenses, Wendell's parents bought him a really cool 1949 black two-door Ford stick shift. They had it specially rigged where the pedals were way up near the dashboard, and Wendell sat on a large cushion. He did really well driving it.

Wendell was kind of wild, so his parents sent him off to Schreiner Military School up in Kerrville when he was about sixteen. One night he was driving with two of our other friends up around Leakey, Texas, and they left the road on a bad turn way high up. They were all three killed. It was real sad. My folks said they had been drinking beer.

By this time, we started going to Rice Temple Baptist Church, which was just around the corner on Greenbrier. I made some good friends there, one of whom was my buddy Ed Wells. Ed's Mother didn't like me very much, but that was okay, because I'm not sure she liked much of anything. Ed and I are still friends to this day. More about him later.

Another friend I made in church was Homer Helton. When Homer was about thirteen, he was playing with a loaded rifle in his room, and it went off when he dropped it. It killed him right on the spot. That was another real sad funeral. My Dad always said that you should never play with a gun, and that you should always treat it as though it were loaded. I guess he was right. He was right about a lot of things, I came to find out as I grew older.

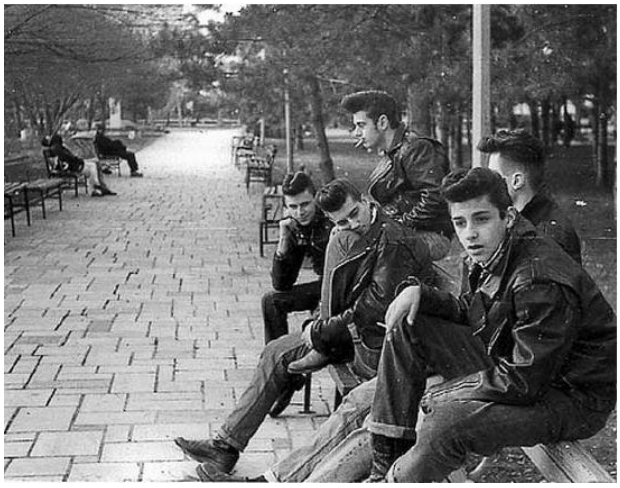
In the seventh grade, I started going to Pershing Junior High School over off Stella Link Road. Boy, things were really different there. For example, if you got in trouble, the men teachers (and some of the ladies, too) would make you bend over and grab your ankles, and then they would swat you really hard with a paddle. They always stung like the dickens, and you couldn't help but get tears in your eyes. Depending on the offense, you may get up to five or six licks. They would make you count them out loud. I didn't get into trouble very much, except the time I got mad at this jerk Safety Patrol. Ed and I thought he was really a yo-yo, so one day we stuffed him down a manhole and he couldn't get out. Mr. Dennis, the assistant-principal, really worked us over for that.

A lot of the kids came to school on their motor scooters. Some even had the really cool Cushman Eagle.

I wanted one real bad, but my Dad said they were too dangerous, and if he ever caught me on one, he would blister me good. So I had to ride the bus, which was really embarrassing in Junior High. Or sometimes my Mom would get up a carpool where each Mother would drive one day a week. Some of the kids even had cars – Betty Harkins, one of the cheerleaders (we called her Betty Ka-knockers because she was really built!) drove a brand new 1955 Ford Crown Victoria – it was pink and white.

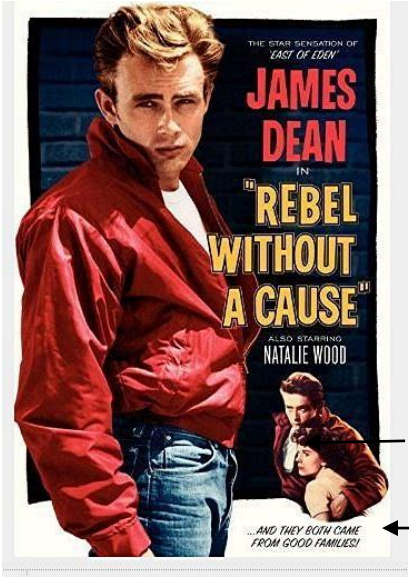
All the cheerleaders and football players were pretty much in a clique to themselves, and they wouldn't have much to do with us peons. Gordon Scarborough was a big football hero then at Pershing. I found out he died a few years ago of ALS (Lou Gehrigs disease).

I didn't care much about studying back in Junior High; it was pretty boring. I even made my only F there. It was in Music Appreciation. Now I love music, but I didn't appreciate much of anything about that class. Ever once in a while, there would be a big fight between two guys after school. The whole school buzzed about it when it was announced through the grapevine early in the day. The guys would always meet at the flagpole, and there would be a huge crowd there to watch the combatants. They usually strutted around a lot, and did a lot of shoving, and then it would break out into a good fight for a few seconds until someone got bloody. Usually by this time a teacher would come along and break it up before anyone got hurt real bad. Sometimes the hoods (you know – they wore their hair real greasy in ducktails, and they always wore motorcycle jackets and boots) would even pull out switchblades, but I never saw anyone get cut.



Some "Hoods"

About this time the movie "Rebel without a Cause" came out starring James Dean and Natalie Wood. Boy, was that a cool movie. They had a lot of drag racing and knife fights in it. And Natalie Wood was so good looking! I think I was in love with her - but so was everyone else.



"And they both came from good families."

Eddie and I started dating some of the girls at church (of course, they also went to school with us). We double-dated some together – he dated Sandra Bailey, and I was dating Carole Palmer, a redhead. Of course, one of our parents would have to drive us and be a chaperone, but it was still a lot of fun. After a while, I decided I liked Sandra better, so Eddie and I switched around, and I started dating Sandra, and he dated Carole.

Sandra Bailey was my first true love. We started dating seriously in the 9th grade when we were both still in Pershing. She had blonde hair, and blue eyes, and she was gorgeous. We were madly in love, and dated for a long time. We were going steady, which meant we each wore the other's disk (a silver disk with your name engraved on it and worn on a silver necklace.) I still remember "our song", which was Buddy Holly singing "Every Day". Some other songs popular back then were "Charlie Brown", and "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes", and of course, Elvis singing "Heartbreak Hotel". We usually went to the drive-in to watch a movie on Friday and Saturday nights, but we never saw much of the movie. We were really crazy about each other. When we couldn't see each other during the weeknights, we would talk on the phone for hours late at night.

My Mom and Dad decided we were getting too serious, so one summer they sent me off to my Granddaddy's farm. For the first time, I really didn't want to go. Sandra's parents agreed, and sent her off for the summer to her grandparents in Hope, Arkansas (home of Bill Clinton.) I was absolutely lovesick, and we wrote each other every day, sometimes more than once. But it only fanned the flames, and we continued dating on into high school. I should have married her, but we were just too young, and my parents had big plans for college for me. Anyway, we finally broke up – I can't even remember why. But I have never forgotten her. I wonder sometimes if she ever thinks about me. I heard she later got married, and had a bunch of kids. I'm glad I didn't mess up her life.

I always worked at a lot of different jobs. When I was eight years old, I began working on Saturdays at the grocery store around the corner for 35¢ an hour putting flyers on car windshields. I mowed a lot of lawns, and I would get anywhere from $3-$5, depending on how big the lawn was.

For three years, I had a paper route. I would clear about $30-$35 on a good month, but my Mom made me pay $15 a month for the braces on my teeth. I threw the Houston Chronicle. I was twelve years old then, which was the minimum age you had to be to get a paper route. My first route was one block of apartments over on Shakespeare just off Kirby Drive (near the Village). It was kind of a crummy route, because people would always move out without paying you (all the losses were mine, too). You wouldn't think people would stiff a twelve-year old trying to earn money, but they did it a lot. I guess I learned early on about how sorry people can be. I'll always remember the stuffy smell of those old apartment hallways. People also do a lot of things behind closed doors as if nobody in the world can hear, but I heard a lot of stuff I'm sure would have embarrassed them had they known.

Later on, I got a better route. I had 15 blocks of houses over on Addison, Dryden, and Swift streets. It was a lot better, since I could throw the papers from my bike. I had two huge newspaper baskets on the back of my bike, and I got real good at throwing the paper. I never had to use a list – I had all the addresses memorized. There was one place on the route where a bad boxer dog lived, and he would always try to bite me. I had to pedal real fast and coast by him with my feet up on the handlebars. We would get the newspapers at a central place, usually a vacant lot. They were in bundles of fifty, and I had about 115 papers to throw. We would roll up each paper and tie it off with string, and I got unbelievably fast at doing it. On rainy days we had to put them in wax bags, and that was always slow and cost a lot extra. If the weather were real cold on Sunday mornings, my poor Daddy would have to get up at 4:00 a.m. with me and drive me around. I would throw them from the trunk of his 1941 Chevy.

During football season, I would work at Rice University Stadium selling cokes or popcorn. We would buy the cokes (in bottles) in buckets of ice for 15¢ each, and sell them in the stands for 25¢. I could usually make maybe $10 on a good afternoon, and I got to see the games to boot. We did a lot of hollering in a kind of sing-song: *"Get your ice…cold…sooo-dey…waterrrr…"*. My feet really hurt after it was over. Actually, the popcorn and peanuts deal was a lot better – they weren't nearly so heavy to lug up and down the stairs as the cokes. If it was really a good game, my sister and I could park cars on the vacant lot next to us for $1 per car since our house was so close to the stadium.

A couple of Christmases I worked for a man selling Christmas trees. The trees were never marked with a price, and he taught me how to size up a customer and then charge them as much as you could get away with. Once I sold a drunken man in a taxi a four-foot plain green tree for $75. That was a lot of money back then, and I got a commission of 10% on each sale. I probably made around $300 for the season, which was really great, since I always wanted to buy Sandra a nice present. Sometimes the owner would have to go out of town, and he would leave the whole lot for me to run – he would leave me his big Colt .45 semi-automatic pistol also, just in case; but I never had to use it. I worked for this man the next year, also; but he tried to get away without paying me, and my Dad had to go over to his house and talk to him a bit before he finally paid me. My Dad was pretty good at talking to people.

I had another good friend from the neighborhood, Bob Harlow, who worked at the hamburger stand next to the Christmas tree lot. It worked out well, because he could always slip me a free burger, and that helped a lot, since they cost about 35¢ apiece. Bob and I were great buddies all through high school and college. We started drinking beer together when we were about fourteen.

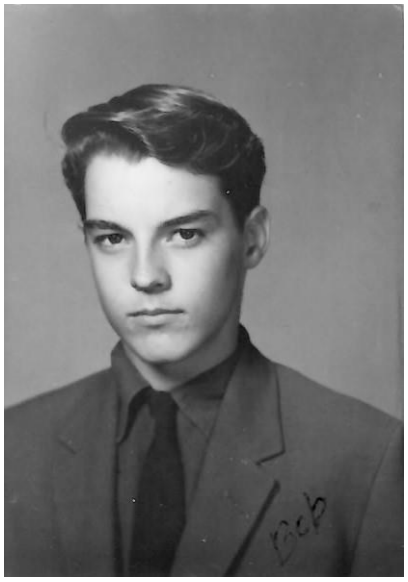
Once when I was about fourteen, a bunch of us were cruising around in Wendell's car looking for something to do on Saturday night. It was Bob, and I, and Wendell, and Wayne Deats. About 9 p.m. we saw a wreck in front of us, and we noticed one of the drivers was walking away from the scene. He looked pretty drunk, so we thought it would be a good idea if we followed him, so we could report him to the police. We followed him for several blocks when he suddenly walked into a drive-in grocery store over on Sunset Boulevard and Kirby Drive. We very casually (we thought) walked in behind him, but he decided he had had about enough of us at that point. So he turned on us real fierce like, and I realized then how big he really was. By then, he had me cornered in the back of the store (all my friends had scattered), and I thought it was just about over for me. Since there was nothing else I could do, I rared back and hit him as hard as I could. I was scared to death, and I only weighed about 135 pounds, but all that adrenaline must have helped, because when I looked up he was laying out on the floor. He was moaning, and he started to get up, so for good measure I cold-conked him again with a 50-pound bag of charcoal off the shelf. That did the trick; he was out like a light. By that time the police had arrived, and they took him to jail, and took us all along to boot.

My parents weren't too pleased to have to come get me out of the West University police station, but the real problem was that my hand was swollen and hurt real bad. Turns out I had hit him so hard I had broken my thumb, so we spent a few hours in the hospital getting me fixed up with a cast again. My Daddy was really sort of proud of me, except that I

really shouldn't have been there anyway. The police were real nice to us. They told us the drunk kept hollering that some policeman had beaten him up with a sledgehammer.

I had some more trouble with that hand, though. Seems I had only had it out of the cast for a few days when some turkey came up to me in gym and grabbed Sandra's disc from around my neck and started making fun of me. Naturally, I had to deck him, also. Naturally, I broke my thumb, again. My Daddy wasn't real happy that time. He kept accusing me of balling up my fist with my thumb inside it when I fought. For awhile, I had a nickname around school as "The Cast".

I was best man at Bob Harlow's wedding. He eventually moved away to El Paso, and I didn't see him very often after that. He finally died about 28 years ago of cirrhosis of the liver. He literally drank himself to death. Before he died, I drove all the way up to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to visit him in the VA Hospital there (in his younger days he was a Marine.) I told him about Jesus as best as I could. I told him how we were all sinners, and that God, because of His righteousness, had condemned us all to hell, because the Scripture says *"the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).* But how that God, in His mercy, sent His Son Jesus to die for our sins on the cross, and He was buried, and raised from the dead on the third day according to Scripture to prove His claim as to Who He was - God come in the flesh. And how all we had to do was believe in Jesus (Acts 16:31), and we would be saved from the penalty of sin - which is eternity in hell away from the God we spurned.



My friend, Bob Harlow

But he didn't want to talk about it. He never thought much of my beliefs. He said he had taken care of all that stuff with his Mom when he was little. I hope he did; but I rather doubt it. I had to give the eulogy at his funeral, and it really hurt, because I had a pretty

good idea where Bob was at the moment. Of course, he could have accepted Jesus' forgiveness some time after I last saw him. But it hurts to think your best friend is in hell.

When I was sixteen, I got a good job on weekends and summers working at Weingarten's grocery store. I was a sacker, and sometimes I did some stocking back in the cooler. They paid a lot better – I think I got about 65¢ an hour there (plus tips when I carried the groceries out). It seems I was always working at some job, but I guess I just enjoyed it. Plus the money came in handy when I had to pay for the movies with Sandra, and other stuff.

Sandra and I attended the same church, Rice Temple Baptist, as did Ed Wells. When I was about fourteen years old, one emotional Sunday morning I answered the preacher's altar call, and I walked down the aisle of that Baptist church and "gave my heart" to Jesus. But I think it was just an emotional thing of the moment, something you were supposed to do if you went to the Baptist church. The Bible says you must "believe in your heart"; I'm pretty sure I believed only in my head, because nothing changed, and I went on to live my life like hell anyway.

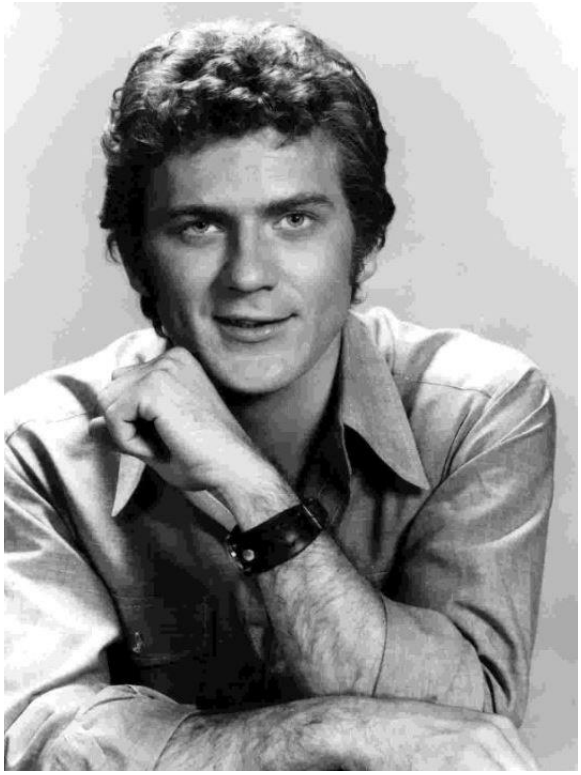
When I got to high school at Mirabeau B. Lamar High, I started getting serious about my studies.

I was a straight A student, and acquired a reputation of being a "brain". But I really wanted to please my Daddy, so I tried extra hard. I was especially good in English – Mrs. Greenwood would always make me read my theme in front of the class, which was kind of embarrassing after the first few times because the other kids would think I was the "teacher's pet". Also, I got mostly 100's in Math. I was a National Merit Scholar, and I was in the National Honor Society, and on the student council. I never was really in with the cool crowd, however; but I didn't really mind. I can't say I was really very popular as were some, but I had a lot of good friends. I enjoyed seeing a lot of them again a few months ago at our 60th reunion.

L to R: Tony Ullrich, Barbara Curtis, and myself.

Sandra Bailey and I broke up before my senior year, so I was on the loose for some other girls. I started dating Diana Bartlett, a really cute redhead who was a year behind me. I took her to the senior prom. I was over at her house making out on the couch one night when her old boyfriend, Foxy, appeared at the window. You might remember him – his name is Robert Foxworth, and he played the lead on some television series a few years ago – I think it was titled *"Falcon Crest"*. It was a prime-time soap opera sort of like *"Dynasty"*. He's been in a few other movies, also. Anyway, Foxy wasn't too happy that I was moving in on his girl, so he invited me outside to scare me off. Being a drama department student, he adopted the bad pose of Humphrey Bogart as a tough detective. He even had on a trench coat, with the collar turned up. Anyway, he was getting in my face about Diana, and coming on real tough so as to scare me. But he had his hands in his coat

pockets as part of his image, so I just decked him before he could get his hands out. I wonder if Foxy remembers me all the way out in Hollywood. Probably not.



Robert "Foxy" Foxworth

So I finally graduated from high school in June, 1959. I had a good summer working at the Long Point National Bank as a general flunky. I did everything there except being a teller. That summer I built a really far-out camper from scratch that had foldout double beds and a pop-up tent. Ed Wells and Bob Harlow helped me out some, and we all went camping on a big blowout later that summer. And then I was college bound – The University of Texas at Austin.

And then my life really began to change.....

But enough for now. I think it's appropriate to pause this story for the moment. I will finish the rest of the story, knowing that the world may not be ready for such a tale. I have done much in my life that I am not proud of, as have we all. I am very proud of you, though. You are one of the best things that ever happened to me. The very best thing ever that happened to me was on April 25, 1985, when I finally accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord. I must be content that my sins and mistakes have been eternally forgiven and forgotten – there is no particular need to rehash them here.

If there is one thing that I could change about my past, though, it would be this – my life would be utterly and profoundly different had I never begun drinking alcohol. I can point to alcohol as the single most destructive element in my life. With the wisdom that 78 years of life brings, I can only wish now that I had never been so foolish to start. I have no one to blame but myself; I made the decision on my own free will. I am grateful that the Lord delivered me from drinking in 1985 shortly after I was saved. I know that children seldom learn from the mistakes of their parents, but I fervently hope that you would at least consider this one as you make your own decisions along the pathway of life.

You have a wonderful life ahead of you; I keep you in my prayers every day that God will bless you, and grant you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. I love you very much.

I hope you enjoy these pictures of my side of your family heritage.

With all my love,

Dad

Obituaries of Some of my Drinking Buddies

Rickie - Died of a heart attack from abuse of cocaine, speed, and alcohol at 43 years of age.

Henry - Died of a heart attack in his sleep from lifelong abuse of alcohol, speed, cocaine, and marijuana. He was 43 years old.

Bill - Died of a heart attack while living at La Fiesta from alcohol abuse at 46 years old.

Wendell - Died at 16 years old in a single car crash while drinking beer.

David - Died at 16 years old in a single car crash while drinking beer.

John - Died at 16 years old in a single car crash while drinking beer.

Bob - Died of cirrhosis of the liver from alcohol abuse at 49 years old.

Patty - Died in a single occupant car crash at 19 years old; was drunk at the time.

Byron - Committed suicide one night while drinking.

Art - Died of a heart attack from alcohol abuse at 46 years old.

Roland - Killed in a single car accident while drunk; ironically in front of where Cooter's would later be built. He was 25 years old.

Greg - Killed entering the Gulf Freeway; he was too drunk to negotiate the entrance. He and his family owned the restaurant chains, *Pappadeaux*, and *Pappasito's*.

Bubba - Died of a heart attack from speed, cocaine, and alcohol abuse at 43 years old.

Torchie - Committed suicide after life-long alcohol abuse.

Jack - Committed suicide after life-long alcohol abuse.

Plus countless unknown others whose lives I helped destroy while in the pursuit of riches in the club business, including the poor girl who was killed when she fell off the stage while dancing at Cooter's.

Thank God for His forgiveness.

Part Two

Dear daughter of mine,

It was so good to see you and your Mom. I thank the Lord for giving us that time together. I want to complete my story, so here goes. I only wish my own father had provided such a record for me- it would have been a awesome treasure.

You may remember the series on CBS many years back, "Lonesome Dove" about two Texas Rangers, Woodrow Call and Augustus McCrae. How I love that movie! One reason is because I can identify with *both* Woodrow *and* Gus. I relate to Gus because he was a "rambler", never able to settle down with one woman. And I identify with Woodrow. In his death scene, Gus accuses Woodrow of not being a good daddy, and of mistreating his son by not giving him his name. That is surely a description of me in some instances. And then there's the line at the end of this clip that's probably my favorite movie line of all times. It's the last thing Augustus says before he dies. He looks up at Woodrow and says,

"By God, Woodrow - it's been quite a party, ain't it?"

Augustus McCrae & Woodrow Call
(Robert Duvall & Tommy Lee Jones)

I can say the same thing about my life, ***"it's been quite a party!"*** And by the grace of God, it ain't over yet. So if you will bear with me, I'll tell you just a bit about this wonderful life God has allowed me to live; and how gracious He has been to put up with me for these 78 years. Forgive me if I am a bit verbose – I think you will find it's a fun read. And along the way, perhaps you will know me a little better.

I'll jump right into the middle, when God completely changed my life. I was born-again on April 25, 1985 at the not-so-tender age of almost 44 years old. Last April was the start of the 34th year of my walk with the Lord. Obviously, I remember that first moment well. I was all alone in my bachelor mansion in San Antonio, Texas in the middle of the afternoon when suddenly, in my musing about spiritual things (about which I really knew nothing), the Lord revealed Himself in a word to me, and told me that I was *"on the wrong side"*, so to speak. He gave me a choice to make, and praise God, by His grace through faith I chose life.

I was all alone; there was no preacher, or no altar call with a choir singing in the background. I was sitting in a chair reading a book (not the Bible) that had an interesting title – *"The Late Great Planet Earth"*, by Hal Lindsey. I had no motive for reading it other than I had a fascination with things that seemed different from my normal world. One moment I was in the world lustily seeking the things of the world, and in the next moment the eyes of my heart were opened to see the Master of the universe who, one day very soon, will return to this earth as the Conquering Lord of lords, and King of kings.

I had no faith of my own to believe in Jesus, nor did I have any desire to know Him, but by His grace He *gave* me *His* faith to believe in Him and my eyes were opened in an instant.

Totally by God's own doing, I was moved from Darkness to Light, and my life has not been the same since that glorious day. Praise God! As the Apostle Paul said, I now *"press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."* Along this path of faith, the Lord has impressed on my heart that there would be suffering. I can testify that He has been true to His word; but any suffering I have endured for His sake- at least so far - has no doubt been mild compared to others.

As I look back on all the years leading up to the day Jesus revealed Himself to me, I see that the hand of God was on me right from the start of my life. I know without any doubt that I was set apart for God *"before the foundation of the world"*, as the Bible so eloquently puts it. It was only a matter of God's timing as to when the Lord Jesus was to reveal Himself to me. Why forty-four years old and not four years old? I do not know; That's God's doing. He alone is sovereign, and I must leave that question until I meet the Lord Jesus face to face. I have come to believe that all our life experiences are part of our training in accordance with His purposes and plans and our specific places in the coming Kingdom. Nothing is lost by our Lord, because *"we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose"*, as He so states in Scripture.

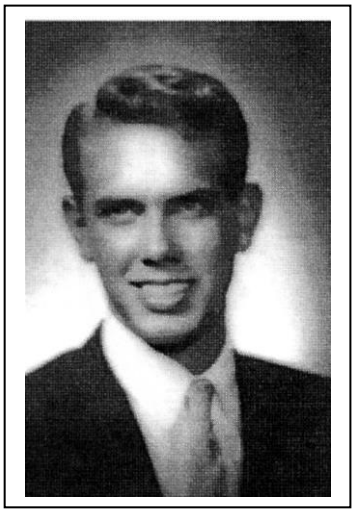
Now I am in no way bragging on myself, as if I had done anything to deserve such grace. (By the way, the short definition of "grace" is unmerited favor. God in His grace gives us what we don't deserve, and in His mercy He doesn't give us what we do deserve.) My life has been filled with sin, probably even more than most. As I see it, I lost forty-four years of personally knowing Jesus. I have nothing in me or that has come from me to commend myself to God. It is all by the grace of God, and my boast is in the Lord.

As a matter of fact, I had grown up around the Baptist church since a child; I even "walked down the aisle" when I was about 14 years old. So I was quite familiar with the gospel message. And had anybody bothered to ask, I would have told them, "sure; I'm saved" (no matter that I was living like hell.) But the Lord clearly disabused me of that erroneous notion in an instant of time. There were no other "markers" to accompany my salvation; in fact, I was perhaps a little disappointed – I thought surely I rated at least some fireworks or maybe a lightning bolt or two in the sky. But nothing of that sort happened, so I went on my merry way, thinking it was business as usual. But I soon discovered that I couldn't continue in my old lifestyle. I had no idea of the changes in my life the Lord had in store for me.

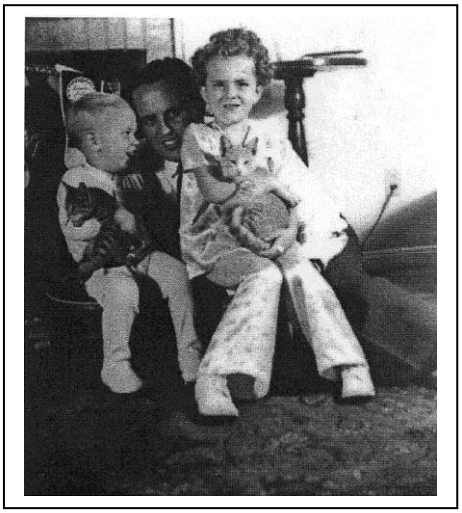
Here's a picture of me being baptized in Houston in August, 1985.

Let me back up for a moment so you will know a little bit more about where I came from. I grew up and attended high school in Houston, Texas (Lamar High School), where I became best friends with Rick McDowell. Rick and I ran around a lot in high school - I'll tell you more about him later. From there I went to my dear Alma Mater, the University of Texas in Austin. Rick was supposed to be my roommate, but he chickened out at the last minute and went to SMU.

My Senior Class Picture, 1959



Me, my Dad, my big sister, and assorted pussycats - Christmas, 1943.



At The University of Texas I studied Accounting, which proved to be very valuable to me in later life. Also while there, I was a member of the fraternity Kappa Alpha Order, and was greatly blessed by this association. Not only did they offer me good fellowship amongst that dreadful sea of unfamiliar faces of some 40,000 students, but they offered me good role models to whom I could look up. Most of these men seemed different from others my age; they aspired to higher moral standards and taught me such. And I desperately needed such role models in my young life then, being away from home for the first time.

Me and Martha Hodges in 1960 at the Kappa Alpha "Old South Ball".
I had dyed my hair white for the occasion.

On the night of my graduation from UT, I got into a little trouble and was thrown into Travis County Jail overnight charged with "Drunk & Disorderly".

THE SUMMER TEXAN

Student Newspaper at The University of Texas

Vol. 63 — Price Five Cents — AUSTIN, — Eight Pages Today

Yugoslav Visitor On Campus Tour

Country Aims For Technical Advance

By DAVE WILSON
Texas Staff Writer

How to Succeed in Sun-Gazing Without Even Trying

Three Students and Austinite Arrested for Having Arsenal

UT Employe Hurt In Bicycle Mishap

New Doctorate May Be Granted

Connally to Civil Rights

Television Repo

Tonight at 9:30

By DAVE NOVEL
Texas Editor

News in Brief . . .

Compiled From AP Reports

Austin, Texas, Tuesday, July 23, 1963

As you can see, the headlines of our student newspaper says, *"Three Students and Austinite Arrested For Having Arsenal"*. Seems we had been doing some beer drinking and rabbit hunting a little too close to the Austin city limits. Of course, like all inmates, *"I didn't do it, your honor"*. At any rate, we were released the next morning - one of my friends in jail with me had a grandfather who was a lawyer, and the charges were dismissed. (That's also called *grace*.)

I married Deanna Dunagan on 8-26-1962 at the end of my junior year.

Left to right: My brother Reagan, me, Deanna, Daddy, Mom, Granddaddy, my sister Donna, her husband John, and their firstborn Johnnie.

After I graduated that summer of 1963 from the Land of the Longhorns at the age of 22, I went into the Army as a Lieutenant. It was a great experience for me, especially considering the fact that I was fortunate to miss serving in Vietnam. I was a Distinguished Military Graduate of the Reserve Officer Training Corps (my minor at UT), an honor which, looking back, was sort of a joke, considering that the most distinguished thing about me was that I could drink a lot of beer. But as a result of that honor I was allowed my choice of active duty assignment. So I chose Europe, and I served my active duty for two years in France, 60 miles west of Paris. I bought a new 1964 Volkswagen Beetle for $1,300, and my wife Deanna and I got to see a vast amount of Europe. Gasoline was only 15¢ a gallon for GI's.

The Army tried to get me to stay in, but although I enjoyed it, it was just too much baloney for me. (The Army philosophy at that time can be summed up thusly: *"if it moves, f--- it; if it doesn't, paint it"*. I doubt that it has changed much since.) I finished out my Army career in the next four years in the active Reserves, meeting one weekend a month and two weeks in the summer.

2nd Lt Malcom J. Bell Jr. has a new silver bar pinned on by Lt Col Harry Corkill, Center Commander.

This is a clipping from *"The Aerial Review"*, our Army Post - United States Army Aerial Support Center (USAAC), St.-Andre-de- L'Eure, France - monthly rag dated **April 28, 1965**. As you can see, they couldn't even spell my name right (Malcolm has 2 "L"s.)

I was in a "rubberhead" outfit - which to you civilians means it was an Airborne unit. I was the only "leg" officer there - which means I for one didn't care to jump out of perfectly good airplanes. That caused me a lot of grief from my fellow officers, who were all rubberheads.

C-17A
Globemaster III
'There is no reason to jump out of a perfectly good airplane.'
-Sign at Pope AFB C-130 Squadron that supports Fort Bragg Airborne

The Army even provided me my personal French secretary to help me in my administrative duties. Actually, she did most of the paperwork. I took two college courses in the French language while there, and with the help of my secretary, Janine Rivoiret, I became fairly proficient in French. Unfortunately, I have forgotten it for the most part. Janine was a neat lady - tragically, she was raped by the Germans when they invaded France in 1940; she was 16 at the time.

My wife Deanna and I did some singing together in some small French towns around the Army Post as part of the Army public relations efforts (among my 28 additional duties.) She is very talented; she majored in music and theater at UT. Our community relations efforts didn't do much good, apparently, because President DeGaulle kicked us out of France later in 1967 anyway.

Deanna went on to the pinnacle in her acting career when she won the Tony Award in 2008 for "Best Actress in a Broadway Play". You can watch her acceptance speech here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BfLcMLh1MmI

I came back home no worse for the wear in late 1965, earned my Certified Public Accountant certificate, and worked as a CPA for Price-Waterhouse & Co. for a few years in Houston. It was great work; in some ways I wish I had stayed with them. Some of my old colleagues there have since retired at annual salaries of $500,000 and up. I did learn a lot there, however; I had access to the "hole cards", so to speak (if you're a poker player) of some very rich people and companies, and I learned a lot from them, because I intentionally paid attention. I had a plan to become very rich.

But in 1969 I moved to San Antonio, Texas to "get-rich-quick" in a restaurant franchise I had purchased - Alfie's Fish & Chips. They were a client of Price-Waterhouse, and I saw a great opportunity there. So I partnered with my old Army buddy, Bob Watts (the same one whose grandfather got us out of jail at UT), and we started out on the road to riches.

Our food was really good. It was an interesting experience, and it went well for a time, but because of complications pretty much beyond my control I nearly went broke before I changed all three of my locations into bars. It just so happened that I was sitting in the right place at the right time when Texas finally legalized the public sale of mixed drinks in 1971. In fact, I was among the only three bars to open the very first day the law went into effect. In the old days in Texas, you couldn't buy a mixed drink at a bar. You had to bring your own whiskey in a paper bag, and they would sell you the mixings. Weird!

In the meantime, I had been working for a character named Major Riddle (that's his actual name, not his rank); I was hired to run his private oil company (Riddle Oil Company) in San Antonio. I had to have a job, because there was no money for me to live on while we were building our Fish & Chip business; we had a lot of debt to repay. We opened that enterprise with a shoestring and lots of hope. Now I met Major Riddle through one of my clients while I was working for Price-Waterhouse. Major was the main stockholder and President of the Dunes Hotel & Casino, one of the largest hotels and casinos in Las Vegas at that time; he also owned several other gambling casinos. I learned a lot of the secrets about the entertainment business from him, and enjoyed some rather strange experiences while working for him.

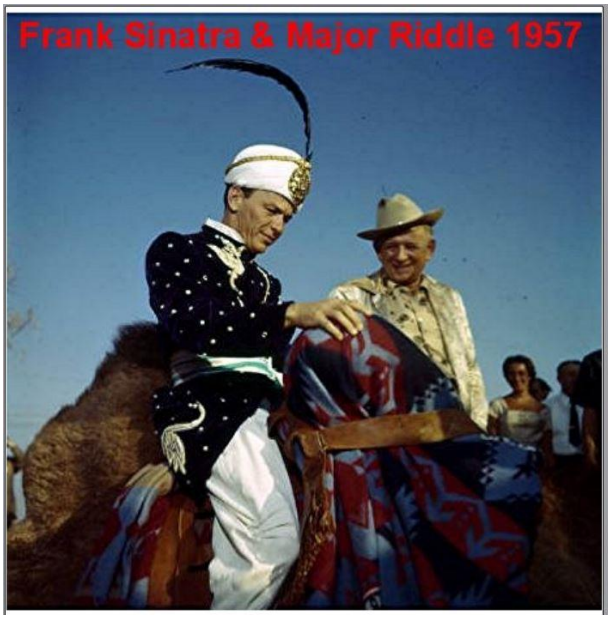
Major Riddle was very "connected" (you know a person would have to be to borrow several million dollars from the Teamsters Union Pension Fund.) Major got his start in the 1920's in his trucking business in Indianapolis. He was connected to the Chicago Mob (although not a "made man" - to be a "made man", you couldn't be Jewish.) He sold out his trucking business and with some private financing, he and his partner Jake Gottlieb bought the Dunes Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas in 1956.

In its early years, the Dunes was known for the 35 ft. tall fiberglass sultan that stood above its main entrance. Many top performers, such as Dean Martin, Jayne Mansfield, Liberace, George Burns, Pat Cooper, Judy Garland, Violetta Villas, Phyllis Diller and Frank Sinatra performed at the hotel. Although it opened to much fanfare, it struggled from the start - one reason was its location at what was then the southernmost part of the Strip (how Vegas has changed since! Back then, it was mostly gambling and celebrity entertainment, not at all like the Disneyworld it's become now.)

The Dunes as it looked on opening with the Sultan on top.

The Dunes as it looked when I began working for Riddle in 1969.

The hotel frequently had to borrow money, and even the Sands Hotel lent its executives to help out, as well as bringing in numerous famous celebrities and entertainers such as Frank Sinatra's surprise appearance dressed as a sultan. That's a camel he's sitting on; Major is standing right next to him in the picture.



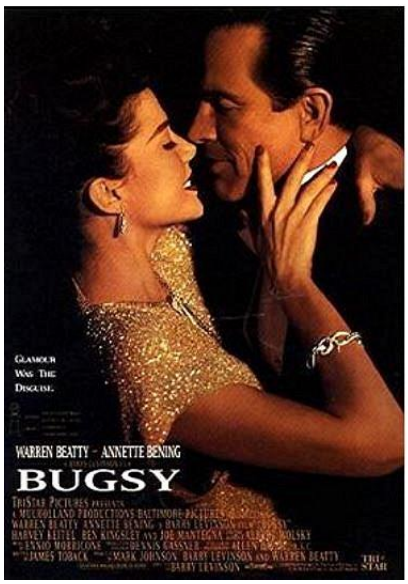
On January 10, 1957, in a desperate move to keep the resort afloat, the Dunes became the first hotel/casino in Nevada to offer a topless show, called Minsky's Follies - the first of which was "Minsky Goes to Paris." The State Legislature was "in an uproar", but the show set a record for attendance in a single week at 16,000. Check out the hats they're wearing!

By 1961, a 24 story tower had been added, bringing the number of hotel rooms up to 450, and it was 1969 that I began working for him.

I met a lot of interesting people around him; for example, I had on occasion the need to call him at Frank Sinatra's home in Palm Springs, California. Frankie and Major were best friends. Those were the kinds of people he ran around with – he knew all the celebrities. Elvis would come in to the Dunes when he was playing at the International Hotel. He would come in about 3 in the morning. He liked it there because nobody would bother him. He'd have on his outfit, his cape and everything. Here's a picture of Major and Elvis together- as you can see, Major Riddle wasn't exactly handsome, but he made up for it with lots of money and power, which I later learned the ladies loved even better.

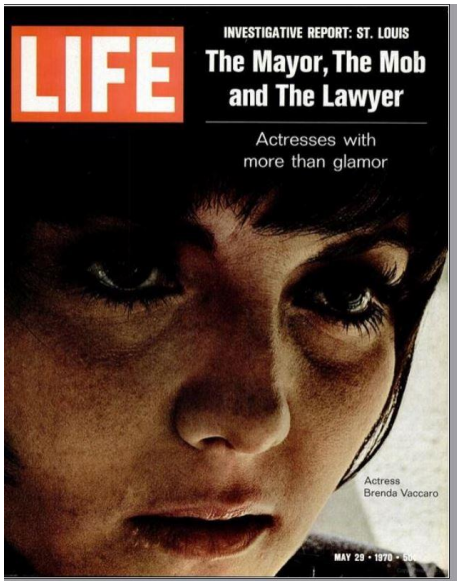
Major Riddle & Elvis
(Major later got a hair-transplant)

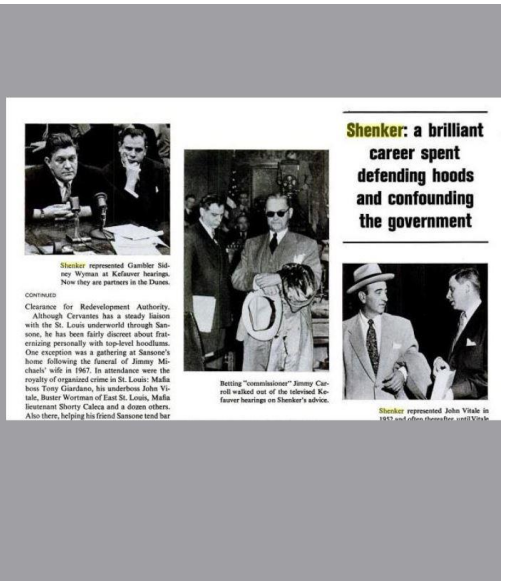
It was a blast when I visited him out in Las Vegas; I pretty much had the run of the hotel. Major used to date Bugsy Siegel's former girl-friend, Virginia Hill. Perhaps you have heard of Bugsy: he was the one who "invented" Las Vegas. Warren Beatty played his character in the movie *"Bugsy"* which won two Oscars; it was about how Vegas began. Too bad for Bugsy; he was shot to death while in the home of that very same Virginia Hill on June 20, 1947. Annette Bening played her in the movie.



While working in San Antonio I once received a call from the chief mouthpiece of La Cosa Nostra, Morris Shenker. Shenker was also an owner in the Dunes Hotel, along with Ray Patriarca, the Capo of the New England Mob, and Major Riddle. Shenker gained national attention in the 60's for his defense of the Teamsters boss, Jimmy Hoffa.

Shenker telephoned me concerning the possibility that I would be called to testify during one of the many Federal trials of the Mafia at that time, and if so, what I should say. I remember Life Magazine did a 14-page full-color spread on Morris Shenker and the Mafia. Mr. Shenker, whom Life Magazine once called the ''foremost lawyer for the mob in the U.S.'', was the former head of the St. Louis Commission on Crime and Law Enforcement despite alleged business and personal ties with the gangsters who operated in the city. The corruption of it all!




Shenker: a brilliant career spent defending hoods and confounding the government
Shenker represented Gambler Sidney Wyman at Kefauver hearings. Now they are partners in the Dunes.
CONTINUED
Clearance for Redevelopment Authority. Although Cervantes has a steady liaison with the St. Louis underworld through Sansone, he has been fairly discreet about fraternizing personally with top-level hoodlums. One exception was a gathering at Sansone's home following the funeral of Jimmy Michaels' wife in 1967. In attendance were the royalty of organized crime in St. Louis: Mafia boss Tony Giardano, his underboss John Vitale, Buster Wortman of East St. Louis, Mafia lieutenant Shorty Caleca and a dozen others. Also there, helping his friend Sansone tend bar
Betting "commissioner" Jimmy Carroll walked out of the televised Kefauver hearings on Shenker's advice.
Shenker represented John Vitale in

Turns out I was never called to testify. The feds weren't really interested in Major's other businesses, other than they might have been used to launder the illegal skim from his gambling casinos in Vegas (Major owned several other smaller casinos.)

This strange contraption is explained below.

I never will forget the first time I visited Major in his penthouse offices at the top of the Dunes Hotel. He was standing with his back to me looking out a picture-window at the desert below when he said to me, *"there are a lot of people buried out there in the desert"*. When I asked him to elaborate, he explained that *"in the old days they used to drive out in the desert in a truck with a power auger attached to the back; they would just bury the bodies standing up in the sand, and that was it."* It was obvious he was obliquely warning me that I might suffer a similar fate if I should ever cross him, since I went on to handle millions of dollars he transferred from his gambling businesses and sent to me to invest in his oil business.

But that never daunted me; I was a wild man - In a sense, I was a bookkeeper for the Mob! It never occurred to me that the bookkeeper was the first to *"sleep with the fishes"* if it ever came time to testify against them.

The Feds were always trying to nail something on him, but they never could. Major told me once he was at a party - a private gambling game - at a motel with his buddy Frank Sinatra, when the IRS burst in with guns drawn and began hassling them – they asked Major where he got the $25,000 cash he had in his wallet (back then $1,000 bills were still in

circulation.) Frankie spoke up and said, "I loaned it to him, and so what of it, G-Man?" A line right out of the old gangster movies.

In Nevada, it is illegal for a stockholder in a casino to enter the counting room. But Major never paid any attention to the law; he would go in the counting room, and everyone would very pointedly ignore him while he raked a pile of money into a bag and then walked out. I remember a similar such scene from the very realistic movie, *"Casino"*.

To say Major Riddle was a rather colorful character was putting it rather mildly. While I was working for him, he had a new-fangled operation where the doctors inserted a plastic implant in his penis to keep it erect permanently. He wore it (his penis) strapped to his leg, sort of like a cowboy wears a gun, except of course it was under his trousers (thank goodness.) Made me wonder if he was also some sort of "quick-draw" artist.

Riddle also appeared on the Tonight Show with Johnny Carson in 1962 to hawk his book, "The Weekend Gambler's Handbook" to promote the Dunes. The irony of it all was that he was a terrible gambler. But that never stopped him. He was superstitious, too; he once told me the Dunes never did too well up to the point when he placed a revolving beacon on the roof. From the point on, he always put a revolving beacon on top of all his oil well derricks. Major departed this earth and went to his reward in 1980.

I personally liked the man – he always took an interest in how my businesses were doing. Of course, he wasn't exactly a model of good character; but then again, neither was I in those days. Just in case you are wondering, I never did anything illegal while in my employment with Major – except maybe for participating in some of his "check-kiting" schemes when money was tight in Vegas. I was just his employee running his oil business in Texas.

But he was good to me, and he took an interest in my Fish & Chips business. When he saw that I was in trouble financially (too rapid expansion coupled with too little capital), he arranged a "loan" for me to convert them into bars. Anyway, I jumped into the bar business with both feet (to put it mildly.) I soon had four bars in San Antonio, so in 1975 I had to quit Riddle Oil and spend my full time running my bar business. By this time I had bought out my partner, Bob Watts. On St. Patrick's Day, 1978 I expanded to my hometown of Houston with the opening of my first discotheque, "Cooter's", with my new partner, Rick McDowell.

My partner and friend, Rick McDowell and his wife Donna.

The interior of Cooter's was over 20,000 square feet, and it was located at Richmond and Sage, practically in the shadow of the world-famous Galleria Shopping Mall in the bustling South Post Oak area of Houston. If you are wondering where I came up with the name Cooter's: there is an old Texas saying, "He was drunker'n Cooter Brown". I later learned, much to my delight, that cooter is also southern slang for a certain part of the female anatomy.

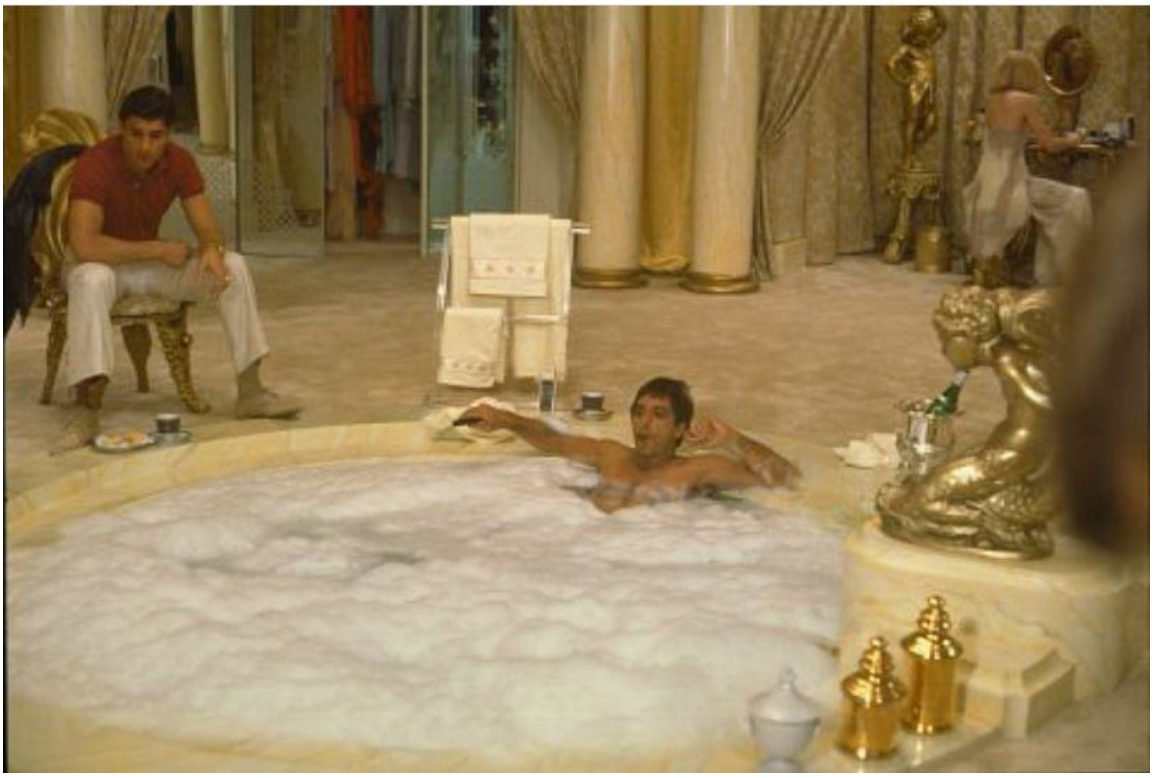
But Cooter's was the beginning of the end for me: I was like a kid in a candy store. Anyway, Cooter's was a huge success. We even received national recognition - we had a write-up in Playboy Magazine placing us in the top ten discotheques in the United States in

1981 and 1982. Many celebrities hung out there - rock stars (especially ZZ Top, who lived in Houston), pro football and baseball players, and so on.

We went on to open others in Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, and even St. Louis, home of Morris Shenker, *consigliere* par excellence.

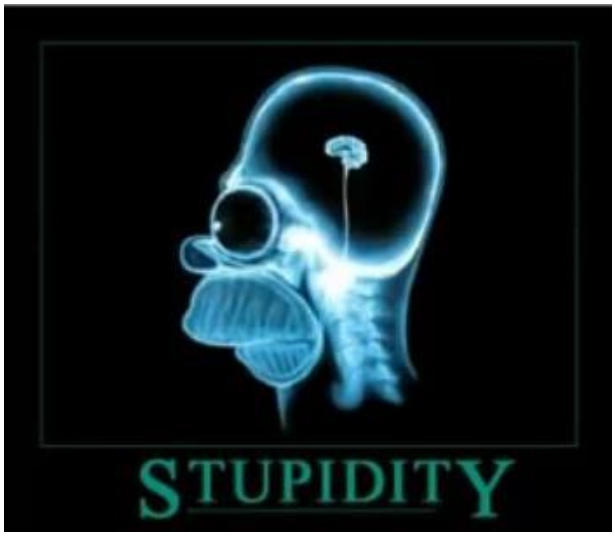
One of my places in Dallas was for a time the top-grossing single liquor license in the state of Texas. It *netted* - bottom line - as much as $350,000 *per* ***month*** all by itself. So I finally achieved my life-long goal of becoming a multi-millionaire. At the peak of my club business, we were grossing over $30,000,000 per year. (That's equal to at least $70,000,000 in today's dollars.)

Unfortunately, it also led to a lot of other abuses. I enjoyed my drinking profession so much that I branched out into cocaine and other assorted recreational drugs. It wasn't long before I, too, was very much a wreck (excuse the pun) – rich, but a wreck nonetheless. I had houses in Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio; several great cars (Excaliburs, Rolls-Royces, etc.)



My San Antonio home was a 5,200 square-foot bachelor pad – the living room had 16 foot ceilings, and covered 2,700 square feet all by itself. It sat on a hilltop on four wooded acres, and the house surrounded a 40 foot swimming pool on three sides. It had a sauna, tennis courts, and even a hot tub on the roof, of all places. The picture above is from the movie *Scarface*, but it gives you the general idea.

You can probably imagine the routine; looking back, I think it would be safe to say that I had much more money than I had sense.



The strange thing was that although I had achieved my goal and was then "at the top", so to speak (at least in my own little world), I came to realize that my life was after all really very meaningless. *("Vanity of vanities; saith the Preacher: all is vanity" Ecclesiastes 1:2.)*

Here's a picture of me and one of my Excaliburs taken in 1981 (I had another one that was black and silver that I kept in Dallas.) This just about says it all.

You can't really make out the "Cooter's" belt buckle, or the $3,000 Lucchesse crocodile boots. Reminds me of one of my favorite guitar artists, Ry Cooder, and his song, *Crazy About An Automobile.*

I also discovered that my sex appeal to women increased in direct proportion to my bank account; this suited my "rambler" lifestyle just fine. I also discovered that my fertility seemed to increase by the same proportion.

Here's my car in front of "Fizz", one of several other discos we built in Houston.

But I am forever blessed that in 1985 the most significant thing ever to happen in my life occurred when I became a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ. That blows away most people that knew me before. (Are you kidding; him?) But I finally found what I had, unknowingly, been looking for all my life.

But at the time, I was unmarried, and I heartily partook in the normal dating and messing-around scene for a rich, eligible bachelor. The Lord led me out of that lifestyle in a rather unique way that is probably not appropriate to discuss here. Then he led me to totally give up my former lifestyle of drinking alcohol which I had begun at the early age of 14, and that's a rather interesting testimony all by itself.

After I was born again, I continued in my usual drinking habits. It was my normal style to drink at least 1/2 quart of Scotch every night. Think about it: my profession was running totally wild discotheques 7 nights a week; and of course, I heartily partook of all the goings on. I *loved* my business, and I drove home every night - in a flashy car, mind you - at around 3 a.m. or later, completely stoned and drunk, and I never got caught. That's grace! For whatever His reasons, the Lord chose to protect me from DWI arrest. This is not to say this implies the Lord's approval of this. Not at all. One of the laws no one escapes in this life states:

> *Galatians 6:7*
> *Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*

Some worldly religions have also recognized this truth. The Hindus call it karma. And believe me, I certainly *have* reaped for my transgressions, but it other ways that at first

glance are not obviously the result of my sowing. For example, 9 years ago I developed cancer of the base of the tongue: partly as a result of this lifestyle. Now the Lord, in His grace, healed me of that - but not before my battle left me with a few parts that don't work right. Specifically, as you are aware, I can no longer eat solid foods, and I haven't for 9 years now. God forgives you of your past when you become a Christian, but He does not *necessarily* relieve you from reaping in this life what you have sown.

But after a while of continuing my drinking lifestyle, I noticed something very different. When I was first born again, it was as if the Lord were continually present at my side; I could literally feel the joy of His presence. But after a few days of this, when I took my first drink of the day - usually around 5 pm (a habit I picked up in the Army) - I sensed His presence was suddenly gone altogether, as if with the snap of the fingers.

This disturbed me, so I began seeking the answer why. I searched the Scriptures, and I found that (being prejudiced as I was, mind you) I could build a case for continuing to drink as before. After all, Jesus Himself drank wine; He even miraculously *made* wine for a wedding party, and so on. But the pressure from the Holy Spirit was relentless. So early one morning while sitting alone at my desk in my office, in frustration I simply asked, "Lord, what would *You* have me do?"

What happened next blew me away. *Immediately* after I uttered that prayer, the telephone on my desk rang. It was Bill Salter, a Christian friend of mine in Houston; he didn't even say hello. He said, ***"God wants you to stop drinking!"*** Well, that literally made the hair on the back of my neck stand up. No doubt now; I had heard the answer from God. So what should I do next?

Now understand: I was a baby Christian only a few weeks old in the Lord. But the Lord led me what to do next. I went through my house and collected all the booze I had on hand - some 350 bottles of nearly every known alcoholic beverage type you could think of. I was, after all, in the booze business! And I took them to my dumpster and broke them all, and declared I was through with alcohol. And from that day, over 34 years ago, God delivered me totally and completely from alcoholism. And it was very painless; I simply *never wanted* a drink again from that day on. That also is called *grace*. No twelve steps, no AA meetings, no nothing. The desire was simply and totally gone.

> *John 8:36*
> *If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.*

My life had turned around the proverbial 180 degrees. In a matter of a few short weeks, the Lord led me to resign as President and CEO from my own $30,000,000-a-year

discotheque-restaurant-nightclub business that we had built to a pinnacle of complete success. Then in August of that year, He made what I thought was a very unusual request (with hindsight, it was actually a command); it also contained the promise that I would be made "perfect."

> …… ***If thou wilt be perfect****, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.*
> *Matthew 19:21*

That's what Jesus told the Rich Young Ruler. I had no idea what it meant to "be perfect". But I was (and still am) so smitten with my Savior, that nothing He could ask was too great.

So I happily complied, much to the distress of some of my family (and friends, and especially my business partner, Rick McDowell.) Like I said, Rick and I had been friends since high school. But because there was no one person to come forward to purchase my holdings, I put all my assets in a tax-exempt charitable trust and proceeded to give it all away – while at the same time the trust was experiencing enormous tax-free income. I even put my glorious bachelor pad up for sale, and it sold *the very next day* for my total asking price. I have many great memories of that time, and I learned by experience that it is indeed, as Jesus said, *"more blessed to give than receive".* I even built and paid for a church in Houston.

One of my favorite memories of being so blessed to give is this: I was attending services at the church I built in Houston (I was not the Pastor) - Memorial West Christian Center - when I noticed a small elderly black man sitting by himself at the back; he was dressed very conservatively in a black suit and tie. When the service was over, I introduced myself to him. Turns out he was from Teakettle, Belize (formerly British Honduras); he had the most delightful British accent. When I asked, he told me he was 87 years old. When I asked him what brought him to our church, he replied,

> *"I have been running a small orphanage and school in a very remote part of Belize for many years. Just recently we were attacked by robbers who not only*

stole our generator and other supplies, they also destroyed our schoolhouse. I am looking for the funds to buy cement blocks to rebuild the school. The Lord told me that if I came to this church, I would meet a man who would write me a check".

Well, my jaw nearly dropped to the floor. Turns out I did indeed write him a check - it was for $5,000 (although he said he only needed $3,500). I spent the rest of that Sunday afternoon fellowshipping with him. He was a very unassuming, very gentle and polite man. But he had a godly aura about him that you could literally feel when around him. It was like being in the presence of the Lord Jesus Himself. He was the most godly man I ever met or have met to this day. He made the statement to me once that, "I have been walking with the Lord for over 70 years now". It was quite apparent this was so.

Well, in the meantime, the Lord had placed in me an insatiable desire for His Word. With hindsight, I now see what the Lord was really working in my life – He was bringing me to the end of self – especially the self-sufficiency of always making my own living somehow: of being in charge of my life - *"the captain of my fate, the captain of my soul"*, as the poem *Invictus* goes. I was being totally humbled from an arrogant, self-made multi-millionaire to a position of total dependence on Him.

So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. Luke 14:33

Without going into all the details, it took 10 years for me to finally give away all my money. He brought me to a total end of myself in December, 1996. At that point, I had been reduced to selling home-made bubble-makers at various Arts & Crafts shows (how the mighty had fallen), and I was barely making a living. I made them for 25¢, and sold them for $3, or 2 for $5. I could make about 50 in one hour. Then the Lord told me *once again* to give away all that I had; this time, it was only about $1,200. I gave away the money and the bubble-making business to a Christian friend of mine who was very poor, and he made a good living from it for over eight years.

You can't really see the bubble he is making. It's about 30" in diameter.

Again, with hindsight, I now realize that *that* giving was much more significant in God's eyes than all my previous millions, because that time I had given *"all my living".*

> *For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living. Mark 12:44.*

So I had to depend totally on the Lord for my finances for the entire next year until December, 1997, at which point the Lord allowed me to take a job making $200 a week (which I was very grateful to get).

The day after this bonfire, January 1, 1997, I had an experience more awesome than I can adequately describe.

The following morning on New year's Day, Ed & Patsy and I and a few others went to visit Patsy's Mom in a rest home nearby in Giddings. We led her Mom to the Lord during a very emotional time. I was totally in the Spirit like I had never been before. The Lord then told me to visit a few of the other residents, which I did. Later I found myself in the rest home cafeteria. There was no one there, except for an old man sitting by himself at a table at the far end; he was dressed in what seemed to be a robe, which was not unusual in a rest home. The Lord told me to go to him and ask him, "Do you know the Lord Jesus Christ?" I did, and he replied, "Yes, I've known Him for a very, very long time".

Then he stood up and launched into reciting the most beautiful poem I had ever heard. He went on and on, stanza after stanza, in perfect cadence (iambic pentameter) for a long time - perhaps ten minutes. The poem was all about "The Master". Towards the end he

began prophesying over me personally: telling me things that were to happen in my life in the future.

When he finished, I was completely overwhelmed and on my knees weeping. When I recovered, I looked up and he was gone.

> *Hebrews 13:2*
> *Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.*

It is intriguing that a personal prophecy given to me on 11-25-1986 from a dear pastor friend of mine opened with a *Word from the Lord:* "Madrigal" (which means a short poem.) No one at that time understood what this prophecy meant. But this incident was the fulfillment of that prophecy. Also in that prophecy, mention was made that I would be fasting at this time of my life. I have been fasting for over 9 years now, because the radiation I received for throat cancer left me unable to eat solid foods.

> *Daniel 10:2-3*
> *2 In those days I Daniel was mourning three full weeks.*
> *3* ***I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth,*** *neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.*

Following is this prophecy dated 11-25-86:

11-25-86 Durango, Co.

Concerning Malcolm and Bambi Bell:

Word from the Lord, Madrigal, which means: Short Poem.

Prophecy: As a reed by the waters edge, so is my servant among the Body. The breaking of the reed causes pain, but the pain is a source of victory. HALLEUJAH!

Hosea 13:15 Though he flourishes among the reeds, an east wind will come. The wind of the Lord coming up from the wilderness, and his fountain will become dry, and his spring will be dried up. It will plunder his treasury of every precious article! ASV

Isa. 58, whole chapter, over and over. (notice reed, v.5)

Psm. 31:24 BE STRONG AND LET YOUR HEART TAKE COURAGE.....

Prophecy: A humbling must happen, a humbling like you have never seen. To break all power of the evil one and his presence forever. Your right attitude toward me is worth all the gold in this present world. I will dwell with you in a way you have never experienced or imagined. You will make me Lord and depend upon me completely. My light within you will arise out of the darkness of your soul and illuminate you and all those around you. You will be a guide for the blind and feeble. My light will light your path. Your strength will come from me.

Now, you are fasting the way (your way) that I have chosen. You are my beloved, be strong with my strength, here it is, take it and use it. With my strength, you receive peace, courage and unearthly wisdom. Follow me, beloved, we are just starting together, Look at what's ahead!

WHEN CHRIST CALLS A MAN, HE BIDS HIM COME AND DIE. D. BONHOEFFER

Malcolm. I received part of this on the 24th. Effie got the word, Madrigal. I do not know what that means for sure. Boy! Are you a special person to the Lord!

Love, as your Christian brother,

abe

My treasury has indeed been plundered of every precious article. I am now fasting the way He has chosen. And the Word from the Lord, Madrigal, has been fulfilled. The above prophecy may seem harsh to some, but it is the way the Lord has used to separate me from the world system.

The Lord later (1-7-1997) again gave me that angelic prophecy verbatim, and I wrote it down that day. It is too personal for me to include here. Both prophecies have yet to be completely fulfilled, but I know they will, because the 11-25-86 prophecy has already been mostly fulfilled.

Later that day the Lord gave me a new name.

> *Isaiah 62:2*
> *And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: <u>and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name.</u>*

My new name is "Simon the Prophet". I have been called to this ministry (from the foundation of the world, according to Scripture) but not yet sent. This sending is about to occur, as the endtimes are upon us. I am named after this person mentioned in the Bible 3 times:

> *Matthew 27:32*
> *And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross.*

> *Mark 15:21*
> *And they compel one Simon a **Cyrenian,** who passed by, **coming out of the country**, the father of **Alexander and Rufus**, to bear his cross.*

> *Luke 23:26*
> *And as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and **on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus**.*

Those of you who study prophecy in the Bible may be aware that prophecy can have more than one fulfillment - one at the time close to the writing, and another at the endtimes. You might take note of some interesting things concerning the application of these verses to me.

Obviously, being fromTexas, I am not a **Cyrenian**. But it is notable that I went to **biblical Cyrene** in 1965. I was the Army Escort Officer for a load of weapons bound for Vietnam being flown to Wheeless Air Force Base, which was in Tripoli, Libya - known in the Bible as Cyrene. We flew there from Evreux AFB in France in an Air Force C-130E over the Mediterranean Sea. I stayed there a few days until my assignment was completed.

I have two daughters - **Alexandra** and **Rufina**.

I presently live in the **country**.

Whatever it entails, I will bear the cross after Jesus. I don't know the full extent of this assignment yet to come, but obviously it will ***not*** include dying for the sins of the world. This could only be fulfilled once, and it was by Jesus Christ nearly 2,000 years ago.The Lord has expanded on this Word to me over the years since, and I have a quite detailed understanding of this ministry now.

This is a picture of me from my Army days. In the background is a tacky tapestry that I bought in Tripoli for $7.50. I thought it was really cool at the time.

I spent most of the rest of that year (1997) holed up with the Lord in what I refer to as my "wilderness" experience. I lived alone on a friend's 124-acre property close to Giddings, Texas; I was literally "living in the woods". The Lord supplied all my needs during that time, sometimes in what I believe could have been supernatural ways. It was during this time that the Holy Spirit revealed the Kingdom Truths to me. For that entire year, I had only Him as my teacher.

For the next several years, the Lord allowed me to earn a living at various low-level accounting jobs (remember, I was originally trained as a CPA.) Sixteen years ago, the Lord

had me quit working altogether (nearly all of my income now is my Social Security), and I now spend all my time in His Word. I wondered how I was going to make it, and then totally out of the blue the Lord gave me a small interest in a gas well – not much; but it surely helped. Seems my Grandfather had kept the mineral rights on his farm when he sold it in 1965.

I have been living in a 34' fifth-wheel slide-out travel trailer for the last 26 years. A few years in 2012 the Lord told me to move to Ephraim, Utah, where He said …., *"Arise, go forth into the plain, and I will there talk with thee." (Ezekiel 3:22).* I had never been to Ephraim, much less even knew where it was. But it proved to be an ideal place, isolated as it is at the foot of a mountain, to totally immerse myself in God's Word. And He did indeed talk with me there.

I spent 4 years there among the Mormons, and then moved back to Texas in 2016. I am now still living in my RV, but on my widowed sister's 40 acre property in the country 8 miles south of Hamilton, Texas. I am only a few miles from the birth places of both my Mom amd my Dad - Azle, and Dublin, Texas. Seems I have come full circle.

I truly believe some very important things are about to come to pass as the Lord brings about His end times. I am thrilled to have even a small part in it. He has told me much of the awesome plans He has for me, in surprising detail; and I earnestly look forward to His release – which I expect to be very soon. I am in my 34th year of training; I am now 78 years old, and I'm in very good health (except for two separate recent bouts with cancer, from which, as you know, I have recovered for the most part.)

The Lord made me a conditional, personal promise 34 years ago that He would make me perfect. I understand what that means now. And no, I have not yet already attained, neither am I already perfect *….but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Phillipians 3:12.*

I won't much get into my convoluted marital life - I'm not very proud of the fact, but Elizabeth Taylor didn't have much on me in that regard. Like I said, I'm not perfect yet; but Jesus is still doing a work in me. I'll only say that I have 6 wonderful children - and I am very proud of all of them - especially you. I'm sorry that things didn't work out between your Mom and me, and that I was not the father you deserved.

It's too late to change any of that. I can only sincerely ask that you will find it in your heart to forgive me. The person whose life is described in most of this story before 1985 is dead now, according to Scripture, and now the Lord Jesus lives His life in me. That's what's so wonderful about the gospel - He does all the work, if you are willing. He has changed me into a new person - the Bible says I am a "new creation". But this is something only the Lord can do. And it doesn't happen instantly; He takes a lifetime to accomplish it.

Hope I didn't rattle on too long about my life – as the song goes, "I love to tell the story" - but at least now you know the highlights, and hopefully you know me even better.

But Jesus Christ is the Hero of this story. It was by His grace, pure and simple, that I am where I am today, saved, blessed, and looking forward to being with Him throughout all eternity. I say "simple" grace only in the sense that it is simple enough that our finite minds can understand part of it here on earth; the full comprehension of His grace awaits another era, where God will spend all eternity revealing the bottomless depths of Himself to His children in full.

To God be all the glory.

It leads me to ask people, "Do you know Him?" That's something only the Lord knows for sure. I hope you will continue to live your life in such a way as to glorify Him. But life has a way of throwing us a lot of curves. I pray you will always make Him the number one important person in your life, and live your life in obedience to Him. Everything you do in this life will have unimaginable consequences throughout all eternity.

It's been a tremendous blessing having you for a daughter, and loving you, even if a lot of it has mostly been from afar. You may not have been aware of it, but you have been spiritually covered with your father's prayers for all of your life. I look forward to what's ahead; the best times of my life here on earth are yet to come. I know - the Lord has

shown me. I hope your life will be equally blessed. And we are father and daughter - no one can change that or take it away.

Love,

Dad

P.S. - Below is the scene that greeted me out my front door on Christmas Eve morning, 12-24-2013. This picture does not do the scene justice, as the entire sky was gloriously ablaze from horizon to horizon.

Malachi 4:2
But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.